LANKY LAWSON

THE BOY FROM NOWHERE

HARRY MASON ROE

Doug Shearer

~~Jeff Shearer~~

~~Jen Shearer~~

"So we sat there on the upside-down bushel baskets, wrapped up in horse blankets."

(Lanky Lawson, The Boy from Nowhere) *(Frontispiece)*

LANKY LAWSON
THE BOY FROM NOWHERE

How He Arrived at Beanville
What Beanville Did to Him
And What He Did to Beanville

BY
HARRY MASON ROE
AUTHOR OF "LANKY LAWSON WITH THE ONE-RING CIRCUS," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY
DAVID RANDOLPH

PUBLISHERS
BARSE & CO.
NEW YORK, N. Y. NEWARK, N. J.

COPYRIGHT, 1929
BY
BARSE & CO.

Printed in the United States of America

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	Hoptoad Falls In	7
II.	I Kick the Farmer's Hat	15
III.	Running for Our Lives	26
IV.	The Chicken Thieves	38
V.	A Narrow Escape	49
VI.	I Lose Hoptoad	62
VII.	A Funny Dutchman	69
VIII.	The Old Lady's Wig	77
IX.	I Find Hoptoad Again	90
X.	Back to Beanville	97
XI.	The Rescue of Hans	106
XII.	We Are Taken In	114
XIII.	I Get a Surprise	123
XIV.	We Find Out Something	130
XV.	I Go to School	139
XVI.	A Wild Goose Chase	145
XVII.	Hoptoad's Uncle	155
XVIII.	I Sass Mr. Hooker	162
XIX.	An Oil Stock Boom	169

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
XX.	The Old Mill	177
XXI.	How We Got Out	183
XXII.	My Strange Discovery	190
XXIII.	A Queer Letter Box	196
XXIV.	The Fake Exposed	203
XXV.	I Move On	209

ILLUSTRATIONS

"So we sat there on the upside-down bushel baskets, wrapped up in horse blankets." (Page 46) . . . . . *Frontispiece*

PAGE

"Oh, boy! What have you done?" she yells at me 87

"Have mercy on that noble man!" I cried 117

"Go slow, Mr. Hooker, or I'll hook you!" . . 171

LANKY LAWSON
THE BOY FROM NOWHERE

CHAPTER I

HOPTOAD FALLS IN

"Where'd you come from, Lanky?" Hoptoad asked me when we were sitting on the bank of the little river, cooling our feet in the water and getting outside the bread and butter, with some doughnuts on the side, that a lady in Bordenville had given us that morning. "Come on now, spill it, where'd you come from?"

"Come from?" I went right back at him. "Why, Petertown, of course, same as you did."

"No, I mean before that," says Hoptoad, making a motion as if he was going to shy a doughnut at a chipmunk on the other side of the water. And then he thought better of it and began eating the doughnut himself. It's a good thing he did for I was just ready to grab his arm if he had thrown it and I could easy have knocked it out of his hand and had that doughnut for myself. But Hoptoad fooled me.

"Yes," I says, wondering what my pal was getting at, "I drifted in here from Petertown,

same as you did. What's the matter? I guess your memory is the thing you forget with."

"None of your wise cracks!" says Hoptoad, but he was grinning and I could see he took it all good natured. "I mean before you come from Petertown."

"Oh," I shoots back at him, "let me see. Why it was Riverdale, and before that Cooperton, and before that—"

"No, you don't get me at all!" and Hoptoad flings his hands around in the air like he was puzzled. And he forgot he had some grub in one hand and a good half slice of bread and butter fell in the river right near the rocks where we were sitting. "I mean where'd you come from when you was little. I mean when you was bor—Gee! Lookit the fish go after my piece of bread, will you!" Hoptoad yelled. "If we only had some hooks and lines we could catch a fine mess!"

Hoptoad was all right but he could ask more questions to the hour than any other boy could answer in a year of Saturdays. At first I thought he was a regular can opener for getting at things, but after I got to know him better I found out he only asked questions to pass the time.

"Gee lookit those fish!" Hoptoad yells again. "If we could only catch some we could fry 'em over a fire right here, and with what bread and butter we got left we'd have a fine meal."

"There's no reason why we can't catch some," I says and I reached over and put a thistle down on the rock where Hoptoad had been sitting. I

figured if he sat down in the same place as before he'd get up mighty sudden and it would be good exercise for him, 'cause Hoptoad is a bit lazy. But he didn't sit down on my thistle.

"How you going to catch fish if you haven't got hooks and lines?" Hoptoad asks.

"Well," I replies back to him, quiet like so he wouldn't think I was getting high hat which I never do, "well," I says, "I got the hooks and lines and we ought to be able to dig a few worms around here."

"Hot dog!" shouts Hoptoad.

"No," I come back at him, "hot fish if we can fry 'em like you say you can."

"I can fry 'em all right if you'll help catch 'em," was what Hoptoad shot at me.

"Without a frying pan?" I wanted to know, and I admit that makes it look like I was pretty good myself at asking questions. But I'm not any more like Hoptoad than a school teacher is like a piece of chalk.

"I can hammer a frying pan out of one of those tin cans," and Hoptoad points to a lot of 'em on the bank of the little river. "But let's see your hooks and lines."

I always carry a couple of hooks with me, with the sharp ends stuck in the end of a cork so they won't stick. And I had my lines in another pocket. So it wasn't any time at all after Hoptoad dug some worms with a pointed stick before we were both sitting there casting in and waiting for bites.

And in fishing Hoptoad forgot to ask questions for a while about where I came from. As for me —well, it was nice and warm and sunny and all that, sitting there on the rocks, but I couldn't help feeling that it was dark and cold, too. I always felt that way when I got to thinking of who I was, or, maybe I better say who I wasn't. For I wasn't anybody.

I was just a nobody from nowhere.

I hadn't any folks or relations that I knew of. I hadn't any regular place to live since I ran away from the poorhouse. That's where I used to live, and it was all I could remember of where I came from. The Rothentown poorhouse—we boys used to call it the Rottentown poorhouse.

"This is the life; hey?" Hoptoad calls over to me, for he was standing on the rocks a little closer to the water than I was, for he'd cut himself a shorter pole. "Oh, boy! How do you like this?"

"Pretty good," I replied. I guess I was a little out when I thought that trying to get bites would close Hoptoad's mouth for a while. But he just couldn't seem to stop asking questions.

"It'll be better if we get some fish," I kept on with.

"Oh, we'll get 'em all right," my pal remarks. "Didn't you see how they jumped up to get that piece of bread and butter I dropped in? And I wish I hadn't 'cause I haven't much left and fish without bread and butter isn't very good eating."

"No," I says, "it's kind of like lemonade without any sugar in."

All of a sudden, I got a bite and hauled up a big fish.

"Gee!" yells Hoptoad and he got so excited that he pulled in his own line and dropped his pole while I jumped back in the grass to nab my fish which had got off the hook and was flopping around. I was afraid it might flop itself back into the water. I've seen 'em do that.

"Wow!" yells Hoptoad all excited.

"Say," I comes back at him with, "are you fishing or have you paid admission to this exhibition of how to keep a fish after you get him?"

"All right," Hoptoad makes answer, "but you needn't get sore about it."

"I'm not sore," I says. "But if we're fishing let's fish," and by this time I'd run a string with a stick on through the gills of my fish and then I parked it in a little pool of water where it would keep fresh until we'd caught enough for a meal.

Hoptoad picked up his pole and line again and was going to throw it in when I says to him:

"Hadn't you better put a worm on that hook?"

"Gosh!" he yells and when he looked and saw that all his bait had been nibbled off he says: "I guess maybe I had a bite."

"I guess maybe you did," I replied and I noticed that his eyes were wide open like a kid's when he sees a whole window full of candy and hasn't got a cent. "And you'll have a fish pretty soon if you keep at it," I advises him.

"I will," says Hoptoad.

Well, we kept on fishing and I caught another,

not as big as the first, before Hoptoad got a bite and he began to feel pretty glum.

"What's the matter of me?" he wants to know.

"Maybe you haven't chucked in at a good place," I says. "Come over here if you want to," for I seemed to have my hook down in a pool where the fish were spending their vacation.

"If you don't mind I will," Hoptoad says and he climbed over the rocks, which were sort of slippery, and stood near me.

We both watched our cork bobbers then for a while and didn't say much. It was getting hot and still down there by the river and it was a nice place if I could have stopped thinking about myself and wondering what was going to become of me. I liked to fish but I'd have liked it a heap sight better if I could have seen my way ahead.

"I felt a hard nibble then," Hoptoad says, all of a sudden.

"Keep still," I tells him, and I kept watching my own cork for I felt a nibble myself. "Wait till he takes hold and then yank him out."

But my fish sort of shied away and so did Hoptoad's and nothing much happened for about a minute and then, all of a sudden, Hoptoad gives a jump.

I could see the end of his pole bend down and his cork bobber went away under, not just a little dip, but away down under. It was a big fish that had hold of the bait. The question was, and Hoptoad didn't need to ask it, would the fish take the hook?

Hoptoad looks over at me but I didn't say anything for I wanted him to stand on his own feet and not on mine. So I let him alone. The cork bobbed up once, which was a sign that the fish after Hoptoad's bait had let go. He was going to say something but, all at once, the cork bobbed under again and then started off up stream.

"By golly! I got him!" shouts Hoptoad and he struck and then he yanked up on his pole and he hauled out the biggest fish yet—a regular whopper.

"Wow!" Hoptoad cuts loose with and he sailed that fish over his head and onto the grass back of us. And then, all of a sudden, Hoptoad slips on the wet rocks and into the water he goes—ker socko!

Gee what a splash he made!

I dropped my pole and made a grab for him but he just slid past me like he was a greased pig at a county fair and then I didn't see him any more for he went under water.

I stood there for a second or two, not doing anything though I wanted to laugh when I thought of the funny look on Hoptoad's face as he went in ker-flop! I was waiting for him to come up, for I knew he could swim as good as I could.

But Hoptoad didn't come up!

I thought maybe he was up to some tricks—swimming under water like I knew he could do—so I waited for I didn't want him to have the laugh on me which he would have done if I'd

jumped in to rescue him and he bobbed up on the other side of the river.

But Hoptoad didn't come up!

My heart was beating fast then, like a watch ticking overtime, and I kicked my pole out of the way, ready to jump in for I didn't want to get my feet tangled in the line nor stick myself on the hook.

Then, all of a sudden I saw Hoptoad's right hand shoot up out of the water and begin waving at me—just his hand—nothing more.

"What's the idea?" I was sort of asking myself. I was ready to dive in when Hoptoad's hand went back under water.

But Hoptoad didn't come up.

My heart was pounding hard now. I took a long breath.

Then Hoptoad's head shot up out of water. I could see he was gasping like a dying fish. He spit out some water and gave a yell:

"Lanky!"

Then his head went back under water.

CHAPTER II

I KICK THE FARMER'S HAT

"HOPTOAD!" I yelled at him, though if I'd stopped to think I would have known he couldn't hear me with his head under water. "What's the matter, Hoptoad?" I asked.

For it was mighty funny him sticking one hand out that way and pulling it under again and then bobbing up his head and ducking it back. I couldn't make it out.

But still my pal didn't come up and I took off my pants and pulled my shirt up over my head for I wanted to have as little on as I had to if I was going to dive down and bring Hoptoad up. And I figured I'd have to for he wasn't going to come up by himself never any more, I thought.

I was on the point of diving in when once more his head bobbed up and he spit out some more water, took a long drink of air and yelled:

"I can't get loose, Lanky! I—I'm caught—by one foot—it's under a log, I guess—I'm going to duck under and—make another try!"

So that's what was the matter. Hoptoad was caught when he fell in ker-flop after yanking out that big fish. He'd been signaling to me and sticking his head back under so's to get his foot free.

I didn't lose any time, then, in going in. I can

swim under water pretty good and after I gulped down three or four mouthfuls of air I went for the place where I'd last seen Hoptoad.

First along I couldn't see much, on account of the water being muddy where my pal had stirred it up when he hit bottom and afterward when he was trying to pull his foot loose. Then I saw him.

He was working away trying to get his leg loose from where it was caught in the crotch of a water-logged tree on the bottom. I swam over to him and helped.

Gee! But it was hard work holding my breath. I guess Hoptoad felt the same way but we both knew it was now or never. He'd been under pretty long as it was.

Then we both give a yank at his caught leg and it came loose and we shot up to the top like two corks and, golly, but that breath of air into my lungs sure felt good! I was like to bust, I thought.

I kept close to Hoptoad and helped him swim to shore though after he once got his head above water and could breathe free he wasn't so bad off. Nor I wasn't either.

But Hoptoad was like a half drowned rat when he crawled out on the rocks, and I wasn't much better off except I didn't have on as many clothes as he did.

"Whuff!" says Hoptoad, letting out a lot of air and some water as he sat down in a sunny place to dry. "That was a close call!"

"I couldn't imagine what happened to you," I said.

"I couldn't, either," he says. "But it was good and plenty. I found myself caught as soon as I went under and I pulled and pulled, trying to get loose."

"I was wondering why you didn't come up," I remarked.

"I couldn't," Hoptoad made answer. "But I stuck out one hand and waved it."

"I saw that," I says.

"Then," Hoptoad goes on, "I sort of lifted that log, with my foot still fast in it, up enough off the bottom so I could stick my head out. But it was so heavy—that log—that I was pulled under again. I sure thought I was a goner."

"I did too," I says.

I don't know what I'd have done if Hoptoad hadn't come up. We hadn't been pals and tramping around very long, but we got to like each other a lot. No, I sure wouldn't have known what to do if Hoptoad hadn't ever come up.

Well, we sat there on the rocks in the sun, drying off, but Hoptoad, who went in with all his clothes on, had more to get dry than what I did, so I says:

"What about building a fire so you can dry your things?"

"All right," Hoptoad made answer. "And we can fry the fish at the same time."

By golly! I'd forgot all about the fish Hoptoad flung ashore when he went in ker-flop. I ran

back in the grass and there it was, jumping around but not very lively, so I put it on the string with mine and told Hoptoad it was the biggest of the lot.

"That's good," he says, and then he began taking off some of his clothes to dry them. I started a fire, for there was plenty of wood all around and we always carried matches.

"We ought to have a few more fish," Hoptoad told me and I said it was a good idea. So while the fire was coming up and Hoptoad was hanging his clothes on the bushes near it to dry, I chucked in again. I was afraid our going in the water had scared the fish, but it hadn't and I caught two or three more and Hoptoad landed another big one so we had enough for a real good mess.

"It would be fine if we had some bacon to fry these fish in the grease of, and some salt for 'em," I said while Hoptoad was hammering a frying pan out of a tin can and I was cleaning the fish with my knife. "It would be just fine."

"I got some bacon," Hoptoad made reply while he was putting some stones around the fire to hold up the tin can frying pan.

"Bacon!" I yelled. "You have? Where?"

"In my coat over there," and Hoptoad pointed to it. He'd taken off his coat, same as I had, when we started to fish, 'cause it was hot.

"And salt, too?" I wanted to know, for I could hardly believe it.

"Sure, salt, too," says Hoptoad. "By gosh!

Lookit that!" he shouted and he landed another good-sized fish.

Well, it was all true. Hoptoad was queer like that. He had some slices of bacon, half fat and half lean, the way it ought to be, wrapped in a piece of paper in his pocket. And in another paper was some salt. It wasn't the last time Hoptoad was to surprise me with bringing out things like that unexpected.

"We got enough fish now," I said, when I'd cleaned the last one Hoptoad caught and the fire was going good and the piece of tin for a frying pan had been hammered out of a can with the edges turned up so as to not spill all the bacon grease into the blaze.

"And I'm ready to eat now," Hoptoad grinned.

I put the split fish into the sizzling bacon fat with a little salt and say, boy, they started to smell good and make us hungry all in a minute!

"Don't let 'em burn," Hoptoad said as he began putting on some of his almost dry clothes for we couldn't tell who might be coming along.

"I won't," I promised him and I had a sharp stick to use as a fork and turned the fish so they'd brown on both sides. Between turnings we partly dressed 'cause Hoptoad and I was going to tramp again after we'd eaten. We didn't aim to stay in Bordenville after dropping off the freight from Petertown, but we didn't exactly know where we were heading for.

"Say, boy, those look good!" Hoptoad smiles

as he came and stood near the fireplace and looked down at the frying fish and bacon.

"They sure do," I told him in return.

"When'll they be ready to get outside of?" Hoptoad wants to know.

I made believe I was a restaurant waiter and I says:

"Dinner'll be served, sir," I says, "in about ten minutes."

"Very good, James," replies Hoptoad, making believe he was a rich guy.

So we stood there, watching the fish cook and hardly able to wait. We'd eaten some bread and butter that morning, and a doughnut apiece, that the lady had given us like I told you. And we still had some bread and butter left to eat with the fish. Hoptoad laid the slices out on some clean leaves on top of a stump near the fire. The stump was flat and would make a good table.

Just then, while Hoptoad was looking at the fish I saw, on a bush back of him, a dead dragon fly—a big one with wings spread out and dried stiff. Devil's darning needles some folks call 'em. I picked the darning needle off the bush where it was stuck by its legs and I fastened it on the back of Hoptoad's pants.

He hates bugs and such like, Hoptoad does, and I thought I'd have some fun with him. So after I got the dragon fly fastened to his pants just like it was alive and had lighted there to rest, I gave Hoptoad the pointed stick I was using as a fork and told him to turn the fish.

After he had done this I says, easy like:

"What's that on you, Hoptoad?"

"Where?" he asked of me.

"On the back of your pants."

He twisted his head around and looked backward and when he saw that big devil's darning needle, that looked as real as life, he gave a yell and dropped the stick and began dancing around the fire like a wild Indian and yelled:

"Take it off! Kill it! Take it off, Lanky! I don't want my ears sewed up! Take it off!"

I had to laugh so I couldn't do anything. But I didn't need to, for Hoptoad pranced around so hard that the bug dropped off and then he saw it was dead and he calmed down and said:

"Think you're fresh; don't you?"

"What did I do?" I demanded. "Did you see me do anything?"

"No, I didn't *see* you, but I *know* you done it," he said. And then he laughed. Hoptoad was like that—never mad for long at a time.

"Well, let's eat," I says to him and we were just going to lift the fish and bacon out of the pan with pointed sticks for forks, when, all of a sudden, something else happened.

There was a crackling of the bushes behind us and first I thought it was a wild bull coming through, or maybe a bad actor in the shape of a ram, but in a minute we saw it was a big farmer, with whiskers enough to have stuffed a sofa cushion. This farmer had on a big straw hat and he was mad, I could see that.

"What you tramps doing on my land?" this man yells at us.

"Nothing," I says. I didn't mind being called a tramp and Hoptoad didn't either, for that's what we were. And we weren't doing nothing just then but standing there looking at the fish and bacon frying and thinking how hungry we were and how good they'd taste. So I said:

"Nothing!"

"Yea, it looks like nothing!" the farmer says, pointing at the fire and at the flattened out tin can frying pan of fish. "Where'd you get 'em?" he wanted to know and he began to puff out like a turkey gobbler.

"Oh," says I, thinking I'd be smart, "they just jumped out of the river and we reached up our hands and caught 'em!"

"Huh!" says the farmer. "You're one of these smart alecks, I take it! Well, I'll show you!"

"What you going to show us?" I wanted to know, still trying to be smart which maybe I didn't ought to have done. "If it's anything that will take long," I says, "we'd just as soon wait until after we eat!"

"Eat! I'll show you!" the farmer yells and he was getting madder than a wet hen, I could tell that, easy. "I'll show you where to eat—in the town lockup—that's where! I'll teach you to come on my land and steal my fish!"

"Your fish!" I said with a laugh. "How come?"

"Yes, my fish!" he yells. "This is my land, on both sides of the creek and I own the creek and the fish in it. I'll have you locked up for stealing. I'll show you—dirty tramps—coming around to see what you could steal!"

He was wrong there. Hoptoad and I weren't dirty. We'd just had a good bath. As for stealing, we never did that, either.

"I'll show you—dirty tramps!" the farmer says. And before I could tell him he was wrong or stop him, he rushed over to the fire and began kicking at it with his big boots.

One kick and he sent the frying pan of fish and bacon sailing through the air into the water and it fell with a ker-plunk and a sizzle for the stuff was hot.

"Don't do that!" Hoptoad yelled. "That's our dinner!"

But it was too late.

"I'll dinner you!" the farmer shouts, madder than ever. "In two shakes of a dead lamb's tail I'll send you after them fried fish!"

I guess he meant it, too, for he give another kick with his big boots and scattered the fireplace and the fire all over the grass.

"Dirty, thieving tramps!" the farmer says. "I'll kick you next!"

But we were going to take care he didn't do that. I could see it was about time we got started for the next town, whatever that was. So I gathered up my coat and Hoptoad did the same.

But I wasn't going to let that old wild bull of a

man get away with what he was doing without saying something back.

"You got a lot of kind feeling, you have—not!" I says.

"Don't give me none of your lip!" he fires at me.

"You got lip enough of your own," I says, for he did have a big mouth—bigger than Hoptoad's and his ain't small by any means. "You're bow-legged, too," I says, which he was, his legs having a spread that I bet I could have rolled a small keg through without touching him or so he wouldn't know it if he wasn't looking.

"You're a bow-legged bull!" I called at him.

"I am; eh? I am?" and the way he yelled I could tell he was madder than ever. "I'll fix you for that!"

He aimed a kick at me but I arched the back part of my pants out of the way and started to run. And then I see that farmer's hat flop off for he strained himself hard in trying to kick me and I had my chance.

I turned like a flash—it was close to the edge of the river—and I gave one big kick at that farmer's hat and it went sailing into the creek, as he called it, just like our fried fish had done.

"You dirty little tramp!" the farmer shouted and after he looked and saw his good straw hat floating downstream he turned to run after me.

"Come on, Hoptoad!" I called to my pal and with our coats over our arms and our shoes in

our hands we legged it down along the river as fast as we could go.

But that farmer was coming after us and he was bellowing like a wild bull.

CHAPTER III

RUNNING FOR OUR LIVES

"Hoptoad," I called to my pal, "we sure got to run now!"

"You said it," he come back at me with. "And all our good fish in the river!"

"Where that farmer's hat is, too," I made answer and I couldn't help feeling glad I gave it such a good kick. I hoped I'd kicked a hole right through it but maybe I didn't have that good luck.

"Bully for you!" says Hoptoad and we ran on faster than ever.

We were both pretty good on our legs and I didn't have much fear that farmer could catch us, for he was big and hefty like the pigs around killing time. For a while he pounded on along after us but we dodged off the path into some bushes and he was that dumb he never knew it and ran on.

"Let him go," says Hoptoad watching him go past breathing hard.

"I'm not going to stop him," I says quick like.

And maybe after all, that farmer wasn't running after us. For he was looking out to where his hat was floating downstream and I could look out of the bushes where we were hid and see it sailing toward a point of land that stuck out.

Maybe the farmer that kicked our fish thought if he got to that point of land before the hat did he could wade out and get it.

I don't ever know what became of that hat. I hope it floated out to sea, but Hoptoad and I didn't stay there to find out. We'd got away from the old codger and that was all we cared about at the time. We were both mad and hungry for the bread and butter and one doughnut each wasn't much when we thought of how good those fried fish and bacon smelled.

"But I guess we'll never eat those fish," says Hoptoad as he got up out of the bushes.

"No," I said, and it was true enough.

"What'll we do now?" Hoptoad wanted to know.

"Better make for the next town," I says. "That farmer's mad enough to set the constables after us."

Hoptoad allowed I was right there, so we struck in from the river going across the fields toward what we thought would be the road to the next town, whatever it was. We didn't much care.

That was one good thing about tramping like we were doing. We didn't have any special place to go to and didn't have to be there any special time. We were on our own.

We didn't talk much for a while after starting off across the fields with the river and our fried fish behind us. And I sort of got to thinking of Jim Sovell's poorhouse where I used to live. 'Twasn't much of a place—sort of run down and

with a lot of weeds in the yard. But nobody expects much of a poorhouse anyway, I reckon.

I didn't even remember any other home. I couldn't say I was born there, though I may have been. But I was there when I was so small I wore dresses. I remember that 'cause I can think back and recall how I once crawled under a barbed wire fence or maybe it was between two wires for all I know. Anyhow, my dress got caught on one of the barbs and I was stuck and I cried and Mrs. Sovell come out to get me and she slapped me for tearing my dress. I didn't tear it. The fence was to blame, but you couldn't make her see that.

So, as I said, I must have been a pretty small chap when I was first at the poorhouse in Rottentown. I can't help calling it that. After I tore my dress I don't remember what happened. No, I wasn't knocked out by Mrs. Sovell's slap—she hit hard, but not hard enough for that—but I mean I was too small to remember much. Maybe nothing much happened.

The next thing I remember was I had to work in the vegetable garden that was at one side of the poorhouse. There was a farm that went with the place and Jim Sovell was supposed to run it. But mostly the farm run itself and made a pretty poor business of it.

But I had to weed and hoe the garden and I hated it 'cause I had to work out in the hot sun. Sometimes it seemed as if I would melt down into a grease spot and I used to think my back had a hinge in it and that it was all rusty like the hinges

on the barn door, and would creak if I straightened up too quick after I'd been bending down to yank out the weeds.

It sure was hard work for a small boy and I was small then, though later on I shot up like a weed, as old man Sovell used to say. It was then they began calling me "Lanky," and the name stuck.

Lawson was my other name. And how I happened to know it was this way. I got so I could read and write. First along some of the old men in the poorhouse taught me. There was one who used to be a school teacher. And when I got older he said I ought to be sent to school. He said it was one of the laws of the county. First Sovell said there wasn't any sense sending a pauper boy to school, but he must have come around, for I remember going to a little red brick school about a mile from the poorhouse.

I must have gone there, off and on, four or five years and I got so I could read and write pretty well and do a bit of arithmetic. And it was when I got hold of one of the poorhouse books—though how it happened I don't know—that I saw my name written out—Lawson. There was an H in front of it, though I didn't know what it stood for—Henry or Harry or Hank. I knew it couldn't be Lanky, but that's what everybody called me.

I got so I hated the poorhouse. I hated old man Sovell and his wife and almost everybody in the place. I would have liked the old man teacher

who first taught me my letters, but he'd died long ago.

Most of all I hated Nick Bladder and his father. Mr. Bladder was mayor or something in Rottentown and he had charge of the poorhouse. Bladder was even head man over Sovell and used to come out to see how much we paupers ate, I reckon. For I used to see him in the kitchen.

Nick Bladder was old man Bladder's son and the boy was as mean as his father. He used to come to the poorhouse with the old man, all dressed up in fine clothes and he'd laugh at my rags. All the same Nick wasn't too proud to sneak off after me when I went fishing, for I knew the best places.

Nick used to poke fun at me, though, when his old man came on inspection visits to the poorhouse. While old man Sovell and his wife would be showing the mayor around, Nick used to slip down back where I was weeding the garden and make snoots at me.

"You better look out!" I told him one day when he was doing it.

"Look out—what for?" he asked, sassy like. "I'm not afraid of you! My father's mayor and he owns this whole village!"

"He don't own me," I tells Nick. "And if you don't stop making snoots you may freeze that way and then you'll look pretty—not!"

"Think you're smart—don't you?" he said to me. "I can't freeze. It's too hot," and he chucked a stone that hit me in the back.

Nick's stone hit me right where it felt as if I had a rusty hinge in my back from stooping over so much and I got mad all of a sudden.

"If it's too hot for you!" I shot at Nick, "I'll soon cool you off!"

I dropped my hoe and I made for him on the run. First he didn't know what to make of it and he stood there. I got to give him credit—he didn't run, though I was taller than he was but not so hefty. He stood there and then he picked up another stone to shy at me when he saw I meant business.

"Don't you dare touch me!" he yells.

"I'm not afraid of getting my hands any dirtier than they are now," I says to him, for I'd been grubbing in the sand after weeds.

With that I caught hold of him 'fore he knew what was up. And I caught hold of him good. One hand on his collar and the other at the seat of his pants. Being tall I had a good long reach that way.

So I had that bully Nick in just the right position for chucking him into the duck pond near by and I sure did chuck him. Gosh! I got to laugh now when I think of it!

In Nick went with a splash and he made a big hole in the green scum that was all over the top of the pond. And when he bobbed up—which he did soon, for the pond wasn't deep—why, Nick had a lot of slime and weeds strung all over his neck and face. He was snorting and blowing out mud and water so he couldn't talk much, even

if he hadn't been too scared, which he was. I guess he seen I meant business.

Well, I stood there for a minute looking at Nick crawling out of the duck pond and I laughed. I couldn't help it. He looked so funny. And he had on his Sunday suit, too. He always put it on when his old man brought him out to the poorhouse. Sort of made him look important to us ragged paupers, I guess.

"Well," I says to Nick as he crawled out, "are you cool now?" His feet made funny sucking sounds as he pulled them out of the muck. There was lots of muck in the poorhouse duck pond.

"And how are the frogs?" I asked.

But Nick didn't answer. He was sort of gasping and spitting out mud and water. And then I began to think what I'd better do. I knew Nick would tell his old man. And as Mr. Bladder was mayor, or something like that, and had the say of what could and couldn't be done at the poorhouse, it didn't need as smart a lad as I was beginning to think myself to figure out that I was in Dutch or French or whatever you want to call it.

"Here," says I to myself, "is where I'd better travel on. I'm tired of this boarding house anyhow."

I had a little money I'd managed to put away from running errands now and then for people in the village and I decided to set out and see the world like some of the boys I'd read about in books.

So, knowing after what I'd done to Nick that I'd be in for it, I sneaked out to the barn and hid there in a hole where I knew the mayor or Nick or old man Sovell couldn't find me. I laid there all the rest of that day and all I had to eat was some raw eggs, for I found where a hen had stolen her nest. Raw eggs ain't very tasty but they're filling and I hear now it's quite a fad for sick folks to eat 'em. Only I wasn't sick. I was just hungry.

All the rest of that day Nick and his father and old man Sovell hunted for me. For Nick Bladder's pa was strutting mad. He come near my hiding place once and I could hear him muttering about what he'd do to me when he caught me. But he didn't.

I lay hid all that day and at night I sneaked in, got a few of my clothes without anybody knowing it, and took something to eat from the pantry, and lit out. That was the last I saw of Rottentown poorhouse and I hope I never set eyes on it again.

That was two years ago. I had been tramping around ever since. I had hired out to a farmer, been a grocer's clerk, sold papers in a big city, and helped a painter until I slopped a pot of red paint all over him and then I had to run to save myself from being killed. But I didn't mean to spill the paint. It was just an accident that might have happened to anybody.

After that I got work in a railroad ticket office and learned considerable about trains though

Hoptoad was better at getting on the brake rods than I was at that, and could spot a side-door Pullman a lot quicker.

I sort of liked that ticket office job, but one night the place was robbed and as soon as I heard of it next morning I skipped out. I thought they might say I had something to do with it for I had been hanging around the place waiting for a man who said he'd give me a chance to make a little extra money helping him carry some stuff that come in late by express.

But I skipped out as soon as I heard of the robbery, for I didn't want 'em to blame me and I was sure they would if I stuck around. But I didn't have any more to do with it than a last year's grasshopper.

I had pretty tough luck, after that, getting anything to do, or getting anything to eat, except what I begged. I didn't like to do that but a fellow will do a lot rather than starve. And it was about then that I met up with Hoptoad. It was down near the railroad yards where I was thinking maybe I could hop a freight, like I'd done before, and get to the next town. Though why I wanted to get there I didn't know at the time.

"You on the loose, too?" Hoptoad asks me.

"Yes," I says.

"What's your name?" he wanted to know.

"Lanky Lawson," I made answer. "What's yours?"

"Call me Hoptoad," he says, and I done so though later I got to know that his real name was

Mike Randall. I didn't tell Hoptoad about coming from the poorhouse, for I got a little pride left. But he told me he'd run away from a miserly uncle who licked him more'n he fed him.

Well, we two boy tramps got talking together and that afternoon, when we'd had a little feed from what some railroad men had left in their lunch pails and had given to us, then we got a job with a fellow who called himself Doc. Ward. He was sticking up patent medicine advertisements around the country, driving out with a rattly old flivver and he hired us to help him.

But Doc. Ward was a skin, 'cause that night when he should have paid us off he didn't, but said for us to come around next day and work some more for him and he'd settle for both days.

But he didn't show up, though Hoptoad and I was right there early in the morning after we slept all night in a box car in the railroad yards. Yes, that Doc. Ward sure was a skin!

"Let's get out of this old town," says Hoptoad to me when we made sure that patent medicine fakir wasn't going to show up to pay us.

"All right," I says, and we was going to hop a freight but a man came along that wanted a car of bananas unloaded and he said he'd give us a nickel apiece and all the fruit we could eat if we'd help him. So we said we would and we did.

He paid us honest, too, and we didn't have to spend any of the ten cents we earned 'cause ba-

nanas make a pretty good meal and we had plenty. But we spent one cent at a Dago lemonade stand for a glass to drink between us and that left nine cents.

But we still thought we could do better by lighting out of Petertown, which was the name of the place where I had met Hoptoad and where Doc. Ward stuck us. So that night we stowed away in a side-door Pullman—that's a freight box car you know—and in the morning we got off at the water tank in Bordenville and begged a hand-out from a lady that looked kind.

She was kind, too, for she gave us bread and butter and doughnuts like I told you and we ate most of it before we caught the fish that the farmer kicked into the river.

And now we were running away from that same farmer. Only he was after his hat, by this time, I reckon, so he wasn't exactly chasing us. But we didn't hang around that place no more than we could help.

So there we were, Hoptoad and I, two knights of the great open spaces, you might call us if you wanted to, with a capital of nine cents between us and still hungry.

"What'll we do when we hit the next town?" Hoptoad says to me as we tramped along.

"Maybe we can get work on a farm," I says in answer. "I know something about that."

"I do, too, a little," Hoptoad says. "But say," he comes back at me with, "do you notice how black and dark it's getting all of a sudden?"

"Yes," said I, "it is," and I looked up at the sky.

"Can't be night coming so soon," says Hoptoad.

"No," I answered, " 'tisn't hardly past noon."

And then when I saw a funny yellowish black cloud in the west, like I'd seen once or twice before, I give a yell and called to Hoptoad:

"We got to run for our lives!"

"What for?" he wanted to know.

" 'Cause there's a cyclone or tornado coming!" I yells back at him, "and it's headed right for us! Come on! Leg it!"

And we legged it! We sure did run fast! But that black and yellow cloud seemed to be coming on faster! The air was very still and quiet like and it was getting darker and darker and I could see the birds flying around like they didn't know what to make of it.

CHAPTER IV

THE CHICKEN THIEVES

"WHAT's going to happen?" Hoptoad yelled at me as we ran along fast as we could to get out of the way of that ugly looking cloud.

"There's no telling," I said to him. "If it's like a tornado we once had at the place where I lived (I almost said Rottentown poorhouse but caught myself in time) it's going to be a humdinger," I said.

"Is there any way to stop it?" Hoptoad wanted to know.

"Stop a tornado? Not that I ever heard of," I made answer.

So we kept on running faster and faster, sort of looking for a place where we could go in. Only there didn't seem to be any as we crossed the big farm fields. There were a few trees but I knew better than to get under a tree in a storm. It was beginning to thunder and lighten now, and I could smell rain coming though, as yet, not a drop had splashed on us. Hoptoad and I didn't mind getting wet. Anyhow he was hardly dry from having fallen in the river.

"There's a road!" yells Hoptoad, pointing to one as we ran down a side hill field. "We can make better time there."

"That's right," I agreed. "Scoot!" And we scooted. It was getting darker and darker and the lightning was something fierce now. And every now and again there would be a clap of thunder that made me think of an old fashioned Fourth of July.

All at once we heard, coming down the road behind us as we were legging it fast as we could, a noise of an automobile. Hoptoad and I looked around and we saw, coming for us, a big touring car, blue in color with fancy white stripes on it, a real nifty looking car it was. There was a man on the front seat driving, and a couple of young fellows about as old as Hoptoad and me on the back seat.

"He's in a hurry, too," says my pal.

"I guess anybody that can, wants to get out of the way of this storm," I remarked, for it was going to be a nasty one and right soon.

"Maybe this fellow will give us a lift," said Hoptoad as the auto came nearer.

"Maybe," I said. "If we could get to a cyclone cellar like they have out West it would be a good thing. But any shelter would be fine if we could get to it for it's going to rain cats and dogs pretty soon."

"Hey, mister, give us a lift!" sung out Hoptoad when the auto came closer and we stepped back, one of us on each side of the road so he wouldn't hit us accidental like.

"Slow up!" I yelled.

But I might just as well have hollered at the

wind for that auto kept right on going, the man never looking at Hoptoad or me. But I can't say the same for the two boys on the back seat. They were grinning as they shot past us and I saw the one on my side raise his hand as if he was going to throw something.

And he did, too, for a second later I got a mushy banana skin right in the face smacko. It stung!

"You dirty sneak!" I yelled at the boy who chucked it at me. "Climb down out of that and I'll punch your nose!"

But he didn't climb down and the auto shot along. Then I looked across the road at Hoptoad and I saw him taking a banana skin off his neck.

"Did they soak you, too?" I asked though I knew it must have been some other banana peeling than mine that had hit my pal.

"Did they soak me?" yells Hoptoad. "I'll broadcast it that they did! The kid on my side must belong to some baseball nine."

"The dirty rats!" I said and I was mad enough to have run after that car and pulled both those skunks off the back seat. Hoptoad and I could have beat 'em up good. But I might as well have chased the wind as that car.

"I'd like to meet those kids again," says Hoptoad wiping the mush of the banana skin off his neck. "I wonder who they are?" It was queer how, later on, I met those same boys and had quite a time with them.

Just then came a bright flash of lightning and I

could read a name on the cover of the spare tire on the back of the auto as it rushed down the road. I read:

"KRONE'S GARAGE, BEANVILLE."

"Did you catch that?" I called to Hoptoad.

"You mean did I catch the banana skin?" asks Hoptoad.

"No, the name of the town on the spare tire cover."

"Oh, yes," says Hoptoad. "Beanville. That's a town not so far from here. Maybe we'll strike it some day."

"If we do," I said as we started running again to get out of the storm, "I'm going to ask at Krone's garage who owns a blue and white car. And when I locate those kids—"

Well I didn't finish what I was going to say for just then it was like the skies busted open and let down all the water in the world!

Rain! Say, I never saw it rain so hard ever since! Hoptoad and I were soaked through in a second, as quickly as if we'd fallen into the river. And with the wind blowing and the thunder booming and the lightning sizzling I don't mind saying I was scared. So was Hoptoad.

"Come on!" I yelled, splashing down the road through the mud and water.

"I'm coming!" yells Hoptoad.

There was a loud crack and then a bang back of us and I felt sort of like pins and needles sticking in my toes and fingers.

"That lightning struck right back of us!" cries Hoptoad.

"You don't need to tell me that!" I makes answer. "I know it!"

We sure were running for our lives now, for the storm was right over us. It was almost as black as night and the wind was getting powerful. Luckily it was at our backs and sort of helped us along.

All of a sudden, as we chased along, Hoptoad, who was up even with me now, pointed ahead and yelled:

"There's a barn! Let's go in."

I saw the barn at the same time. It stood at one side of the road and one of the doors was open. We stumbled in and found shelter and not a bit too soon for me or Hoptoad either. We were soaked through and through and the water ran off our clothes and made puddles on the barn floor.

But it was good to be in out of that pelting rain and away from the wind, the lightning and thunder, though of course we could hear the booming and see the flashing from where we stood in the barn. The wind didn't get to be a tornado or a cyclone as I was afraid it would. But that storm was bad enough.

All at once, just as we walked a little farther in, to the middle of the barn, there was a terrible crack and a crash out in front. I looked out the door and I saw a streak of lightning run down a big tree.

"It's striking closer!" Hoptoad yells. "Let's get down cellar."

"There ain't any cellar to this barn," I said. But I was wrong. There was a sort of basement as we found out later, the barn being built on a side hill with a place for cows underneath the main floor.

The tree the lightning struck was split from top to bottom and some of the branches began to burn, but the rain soon put them out.

"That's too close for comfort," says Hoptoad, but after that one big bang the thunder and lightning seemed to ease off a bit, but the rain didn't.

"Well," says Hoptoad after we got our breaths, "I know what I'm going to do."

"What?" I asked him.

"Take off my wet clothes, wring them out and hang them up to dry," says my pal. "There's nobody in this barn but us."

He was wrong there as we found out a little later. But we didn't see anybody so we both took off all our clothes, twisted out what water we could and hung them over the haymow rails to dry. There was big haymows on each side of the barn which had a driveway through the middle.

Gosh how it rained! I was glad Hoptoad and I found a place to come in out of it for the barn was nice and dry.

"I hope those two skunks that chucked banana skins at us are worse soaked than we are," says Hoptoad and I agreed with him.

But now we began to feel a little chilly for the thunder storm made the air cool and with nothing on us we began to shiver.

"I know how I'm going to get warm," says Hoptoad.

"How?" I inquired of him.

"I'm going to snuggle down in this hay until my clothes are dry," my pal says. So he jumped over the mow rail nearest him and began to burrow in the horse fodder. But he didn't burrow very far.

All of a sudden Hoptoad bounced back over that rail and began dancing around on the middle of the barn floor.

"What's the matter?" I asked him. "Did a snake bite you?"

"No," he told me, "but I sat down on a dried thistle."

It wasn't any laughing matter and I helped Hoptoad pick the stickers out of his bare skin and then I had an idea.

"Hoptoad," I says, "there ought to be old horse blankets somewhere around this barn, and I'm going to look for a couple to wrap ourselves up in while we're waiting for our clothes to dry."

"A good idea," says Hoptoad, trying to turn himself into a corkscrew to reach a thistle pricker away on the back part of his left leg. "Go to it, boy!"

So I did and I found two old blankets and Hoptoad and I wrapped ourselves up in them and then we sat down on two turned-over bushel bas-

kets and watched the rain through the open door of the barn.

After a while Hoptoad says:

"I'm hungry."

"So am I," was what I come back at him with. "But what of it? Nothing can be done about it. If we had the fish that mad bull of a farmer kicked away they would taste good."

"I see something else to eat," Hoptoad says.

"What?" I wanted to know.

He pointed out to a field near the barn.

"Green corn. I'll go get a few ears and we can gnaw them. If it's sweet corn, which I hope it is, 'tain't bad eating even raw."

"You're right," I said, "and I'm with you."

With that Hoptoad stood up and let his horse blanket fall so he looked like he was going in swimming.

"What's the idea?" I asked.

"I'm going out to pull some ears of sweet corn," says my pal, "and there's no use getting the blankets wet for then we won't have nothing dry to wrap around us. So I'm going as I am."

Well, I went with him, the same way, for there was nobody out in that storm to see us and the barn was quite a ways from the house. Out into the rain we went, and it was almost like swimming for the drops came down in a regular shower bath. We pulled some big ears of corn and ran back to the barn.

We stood for a minute until some of the water ran off us and then we wrapped up in the blankets

again and the scratchy feeling was kind of good for that was a very cold rain let me tell you.

"Yes, it's sweet corn all right," Hoptoad says as he husked an ear and bit into it. "Mighty good, too!"

"It sure is," I agreed with him.

So we sat there on the upside-down bushel baskets, wrapped up in horse blankets like a couple of Indians and eating the same sort of fodder I once read that the Indians used to eat. The corn took the edge off our appetites. It would have been better if we'd had a fire to roast the ears, or even boil 'em, but we weren't fussy.

All of a sudden, as we were eating away I heard a noise. It wasn't the noise of the rain or wind, and the thunder had died away. It was the noise of voices talking.

"Did you hear that?" I whispered to Hoptoad.

"Hear what?" he wanted to know, as he stopped gnawing his ear of corn.

"Voices," I made answer. "There's some men in the lower part of this barn—in the cow stable," I said.

I looked around until I saw what I took to be a sort of fodder chute leading down into the basement and then I knew the sound of the voices came up there. Making a motion to Hoptoad to keep quiet, he and I went over close to the chute and listened.

There were men there all right—tramps like us, I guessed, only older. Four of 'em there were, to judge by the four different kind of voices. One

voice was low and rumbly, another was hoarse, like the man had a bad cold, one was squeaky and the last was slow and easy like I've heard tramps from down South talk.

It didn't take Hoptoad and me more than a few seconds to know what kind of men there was taking shelter in the lower part of the farmer's barn. They were chicken thieves and they were planning to rob the farmer's roost that night! We heard the rumbly voice say:

"Well, then, it's all settled. As soon as it gets dark we'll raid the roosts."

"Sure!" says squeaky voice.

"And we'll load up the flivver of old Josh with his birds and ride away with 'em," said the Southerner, drawling like.

"Catch on to that?" I whispers to Hoptoad as we leaned over the edge of the fodder chute.

"I sure do," he says. "What about it?"

"We'll put a crimp in this game," I says.

"How?" Hoptoad wanted to know.

"We'll let these tramps get started robbing the henroosts," I says, "and then we'll go at 'em, raise the alarm and the farmer will be glad enough to give us jobs, maybe," I ended up with.

"Maybe," says Hoptoad. "Anyhow it'll be fun to try. But I guess we better put on some clothes to do it."

"Yes," I agreed with him, "we had. But they won't start stealing chickens until after dark. We got a little time yet," for it was getting lighter

now that the storm had 'most passed. But it was still raining hard.

"Our clothes will be 'most dry by that time, I guess," says Hoptoad. "Well, if we keep this farmer from losing his flivver and chickens he ought to give us a meal, anyhow."

"Sure," I said.

All this talk was in whispers, of course, for we didn't want the four tramps under us to get wise to what we planned to do. Then Hoptoad leaned farther over the edge of the fodder chute to look down to see if he could spot 'em and all at once I heard a yell from below:

"Look up there! We're caught!"

It was the voice of the rumbly tramp and he had seen Hoptoad!

CHAPTER V

A NARROW ESCAPE

Hoptoad and I thought sure we were caught then, when the tramp looked up and saw my pal looking down on him from the fodder chute. Or at least if we weren't likely to be caught it meant that we wouldn't get a chance to nab those chicken thieves.

I pulled Hoptoad back from leaning over the edge of the chute as fast as I could but I reckoned the beans had been spilled and so did Hoptoad.

"What's the matter?" we heard one of the tramps under us ask.

"Didn't you see?" says the one with the deep, rumbly voice. "I caught sight of a face looking down at me from up above. We're being spied on, boys! Come on and we'll see who's up there!"

"You're talking in your sleep, Rusty," a voice sings out.

"That's right—you've got a nightmare," some one else says.

"I have; eh?" grumbles the one they called Rusty—him with the deep voice. "Well, I'll show you!"

In another few seconds I reckon he'd have been

up there on the main floor of the barn and Hoptoad and I would have had to run out in the rain like we were going in swimming, for we hadn't put on any of our clothes yet.

But all of a sudden I had an idea. In a pile of hay on the floor I seen a false face. I guess maybe some of the farmer's kids, playing around the barn before the storm, had dropped it there. In a second I knew what to do.

I shoved Hoptoad back out of the way and then with my foot I pushed that false face so it stuck a little over the edge of the fodder chute. I sent down a few wisps of hay as I did this and that was all right for the falling hay made the tramps in the basement look up.

"There it is again!" yells Rusty. "Look! The face!"

This was just what I wanted and with another shove of my foot sent the false face down the fodder hole so it must have fallen right where those tramps were sitting planning to steal chickens.

"You made it fall!" whispered Hoptoad to me.

"That's what I wanted to do," I says.

A second later we heard a voice say with a laugh.

"There's what was looking at you, Rusty! A false face!"

"I knew he was seein' things," says another.

"Just kids playing," a third voice says.

And then Rusty himself out with:

"Well, I'll be hanged! So that's what I seen;

was it? But it sure did look human!" And it did for it was a good false face. It was lucky I found it when I did or it would have been all up with me and Hoptoad.

"Pretty good joke on you, Rusty," another of the tramps said as he laughed some more. "False face spying on you!"

"Well, but there's somebody up there behind that false face, maybe," I could hear Rusty say.

"Only kids!" said the Southerner.

"Well, if kids heard what we was talking about the jig's up," says Rusty, "so maybe I'd better take a look before we light out."

"Aw, forget it," somebody breaks in with. "It was only some kids playing masquerade with false faces in the barn where they come in out of the storm, same as we did. They couldn't of heard what we said. Let's go through as we planned."

Hoptoad and I waited, mighty anxious like, to hear how Rusty would take this. For a few seconds he didn't say anything and then he out with:

"All right! I reckon it was only kids and they won't pay any attention to what we said. But it sure gave me a start at first."

Then the tramps began talking in lower tones and Hoptoad and I couldn't hear what they said, but we reckoned it was how they were going to get the chickens and sell 'em and steal the farmer's flivver to get away in and the like of that.

"What'll we do now?" Hoptoad whispers to me after we crawled away from the fodder chute.

"We better put our clothes on," I says.

So we did this, though they weren't hardly dry. It was still raining, but not so hard, and though it was 'most night we could look down the road out of the open barn doors and see where the farmer lived. When Hoptoad had most of his things on he saw a sort of light blanket, or carriage lap robe, hanging on a peg in the barn.

"Lanky," he says to me while I was thinking whether I could have any fun by putting an egg in Hoptoad's pants as he was pulling them on. I saw where a hen had laid some eggs in the hay. But I thought maybe it wasn't a good time to let Hoptoad sit on an egg. So he says again: "Lanky, I got an idea."

"Save it," I says, "They're scarce," and all the while I was trying to work out an idea of my own as to how we'd catch those chicken thieves.

"This is my idea, Lanky," says Hoptoad. "It'll soon be dark, so what's the matter with one of us putting this light colored blanket over his head and making believe he's a ghost to scare those tramps? I don't mind playing ghost."

"It's a good idea, Hoptoad," I allowed. "But if we just make those thieves run away we won't get any credit for it. What we ought to do is to let them get started robbing the henroosts and then we bust in on 'em, give the alarm and help the farmer catch 'em and we'll be well thought of and maybe the farmer will give us work for the summer."

"All right," Hoptoad agrees. "Have it your way but I sure would like to be a ghost."

"You can some other time," I told him.

So we got dressed and waited in the barn and pretty soon it was quite dark and the rain was still coming down but not so hard and we heard a noise in the lower part of the barn.

"They're starting out now," Hoptoad whispers to me.

"I guess so," I said. "Well, get ready."

We waited until we thought the tramps was out of the barn and then we sneaked out in the rain to follow them. We saw where they was walking just ahead of us, though of course we couldn't make out much in the rain and darkness. Three of the tramps headed for the big chicken coop, not far from the house, and another went toward a garage.

"That one's going after the flivver," whispers Hoptoad to me, pointing to the tramp that was headed for the garage.

"Yes, I guess so," I agreed. "But he can't do anything until the others get the chickens. And as soon as they break into the coops we'll raise a hullabaloo and jump on 'em."

"I'm with you!" Hoptoad says.

We followed the three tramps that headed for where the chickens had gone to roost. It wasn't far from the farmhouse and we could see some lights in there and Hoptoad and I knew it must be cosy and warm and with lots of good things to eat. And there we were cold and hungry and out

in the rain. But if things went right we might soon be better off.

Those tramps sure knew their business. It didn't take 'em long to get into the chicken house which maybe wasn't locked. Just as they went in, Hoptoad and I heard a sharp crack over toward the garage and we knew the fourth tramp had busted open the door to run out the flivver.

Through the rain and dark we could see the three tramps go in the main chicken house and then I says to Hoptoad:

"Come on now, raise as much racket as you can."

"What you going to do?" he wanted to know.

"I'll do the same," I said. "And if it comes to a fight, which it may, lash out with your hands and feet. It's the only way to lick tramps."

"I'll do it," says Hoptoad.

We started on a run through the rain for the big henhouse and as we got there we could hear the tramps at work. The hens were squawking a little but not making noise enough to be heard in the farmhouse over the racket of the storm.

"Thieves! Thieves!" I yells all of a sudden as loud as I could. "They're robbing your hen-roosts, Josh!" and I give the farmer the stage name same as I'd heard the tramps do. "Hen thieves! Hen thieves!" I yells.

Hoptoad did the same only louder for he has a bigger mouth than what I have.

"Burglars! Thieves! Police!" he shouts.

For a second those thieves didn't know what to make of it. Then Rusty yells:

"It's all up, boys! They've spotted us! Drop everything and run!"

By this time Hoptoad and I were at the door of the chicken house, but we didn't stay there long for those three tramps made a rush to get away and they bumped right into us.

"It's only a couple of boys!" one of 'em yells. "Lambaste 'em!"

Some one hit me a clout on the side of the head and I went down for a count of three but I was soon up again and I lashed out with my fists and I guess I pasted somebody on the nose. It felt so, anyhow.

I heard a sort of grunt and groan and then I was knocked to one side and hit the side of the chicken house hard. It knocked the breath out of me for a second. I could just make out Hoptoad having a fight with one of the tramps. I don't know what happened except I saw my pal knocked down.

Then I got my wind back and I went for one of the thieves but he slipped away from me though I tore off a piece of his coat. But that didn't matter 'cause they all had ragged clothes I guess.

"Leg it!" I could hear Rusty yell and it began to look as if the tramps were going to get away and Hoptoad and I didn't want that for we wanted to help catch 'em so the farmer would see we had done him a favor. So I yells:

"Come on out, Josh, and catch the thieves! They're after your chickens!"

"Help! Help! Police! Murder! Thieves!" sings out Hoptoad. Of course there wasn't any murder as far as I knew unless some of the hens was killed.

By this time there was a grand fighting row going on. Hoptoad and I were trying to hold the thieves and they were fighting us to get away. And being big strong men, while we were only kids, they beat us off.

I got another clout on the side of the head that sent me down for a count of about six, and Hoptoad told me later that he was pretty well knocked out, too. By this time we were outside the henhouse and were getting soaked again. We had fought as hard as we could and yelled our loudest.

"Guess that farmer don't care whether his hens are stole or not," says Hoptoad to me.

Then, all of a sudden, I saw a gleam of light toward the house. A door was opened and three men came running out with lanterns and one seemed to have a gun.

"Catch the chicken thieves!" one of the farmer's men yells and they came right at Hoptoad and me. By this time the tramps had broke away and were heading for the road.

"Don't let 'em get away!" I yells. "Head 'em off!"

But the men from the farmhouse didn't pay any attention. They came right at Hoptoad and me instead of keeping after the thieves who were run-

ning away. And in a moment they came up to Hoptoad and me—those farm men did—and one of 'em held a lantern up in my face and I could see another making a grab for Hoptoad.

"Here's two of the thieves, anyhow!" the biggest farmer yells and he almost had his hands on me.

"You're wrong," I sings out. "We're not thieves. We just wanted to warn you and then give you a hand catching the tramps."

"That's a likely story!" cries one of the farmers. "Why, you're two tramps as plain as can be!"

Hoptoad and I sure did look like bums, I'll admit.

Then another man came running up with another lantern.

"Did you catch 'em?" he asked.

"Got two of 'em!" says the one with the first lantern. "The others are running down the road. But we'll telephone to the constable and maybe he can head 'em off! Come on now, you rascals!" and he began to drag me while another man had hold of Hoptoad.

I knew then just what had happened. They took me and Hoptoad for thieves when we wasn't at all. But it didn't need much figuring to make me sure we'd have a hard time explaining. There was only one thing to do—that was to get away if we could and not try to prove we were innocent. So I yells to Hoptoad:

"Beat it!"

He must have sized it up the same as I did. By the light of the two lanterns I could see him twist and squirm to get away from the farmer who had hold of him. I was doing the same and both of us being quick and lively we got the best of the farmers and was soon legging it down the road in the rain, splashing into puddles in the dark.

"Whew! That was a hot one!" pants Hoptoad as he runs alongside of me.

"It sure was!" I says. "The idea of taking us for thieves after what we did to help capture the tramps!"

"Everything has gone flooey to-day," says Hoptoad. "The farmer kicks our fish dinner into the river, we get soaked, and now they want to arrest us for thieves!"

"Save your breath for running," I says, for I could hear that farm bunch plopping down the road after us. I looked back and I could see the lanterns bobbing and then I had a hunch that Hoptoad and I ought to cut across lots, which we did.

What became of the chicken thieves I don't know. We had to look out for ourselves. Those farmers were close behind. Then I heard a dog. It wasn't a barking dog, it was one of those hounds that sort of howl when they're chasing anybody, and Hoptoad says:

"It's like Uncle Tom's Cabin. They got the dogs after us as if we was slaves!"

"Dogs can't do much tracking in this rain," I

says. And it was pouring now almost as hard as ever and we were soaked again.

But we had got away and we kept on running though we didn't know where we were going. All at once, though, we came to a railroad and Hoptoad says:

"This'll save us. If we can get to the yards we'll hop a freight and get out of town. We've had nothing but bad luck since we struck Bordenville."

"Except early this morning when the lady gave us bread and doughnuts," I says and Hoptoad nodded.

Well, we plopped on in the mud and water and darkness and we knew we'd gotten away from the farmers by that time for we couldn't hear them any more nor the dog either. And then we saw some switch lights ahead of us and knew we had struck the railroad yard. A little later Hoptoad saw a switch shanty with a light in it and we drew up, cause railroad men don't like tramps, such as we were, any more than farmers do.

"I'll take a look in," I says to Hoptoad in a whisper. So I sneaked up to the lighted shanty and rubbed the rain drops off the outside of a window so I could look in.

There wasn't anybody inside but it looked snug and cosy with a lantern alight on one of the side benches. I sneaked back and told Hoptoad:

"Most likely the men are out making up the night freight. It's a good chance for us to get away."

"Sure!" he says.

A few moments later we heard the engine puffing and then we heard the engineer whistle for the switch. Hoptoad and I went back in the shadows and waited for the freight to come along. It was made up now and starting out.

"Get ready to jump aboard when she toots past," says Hoptoad.

"I'm all set," I made answer.

We saw the locomotive headlight glaring at us and we crouched down by the bushes alongside the track and waited. We let the first few cars go past 'cause that's where the brakemen mostly ride. Then, when the middle of the train was opposite us and going faster, Hoptoad cries:

"Grab hold!"

By the gleam of a switch light I could see him make a grab for the hand rail of a freight car and he jumped up and got one foot on the iron loop that hangs there just for that. Hoptoad swung himself up in between two cars on the bumpers. I knew then he was all right and could climb up to a safe place. I made ready to grab the next car that came past. If the freight had only been standing still we could have got in one of the side-door Pullmans. But we had to do the best we could this time.

I stood up and got set, for the freight was going faster now and I knew there'd be a hard yank on my arms when I grabbed the hand rail. Then as it came flashing to me, all glistening in the light

of the switch lamp, for the rain was coming down hard, I made a jump.

I managed to get one hand on the iron rail but the other slipped off on account of the water. I had to run along the track keeping up with the freight train that was all the time going faster.

"Jump up, Lanky!" I heard Hoptoad yell and I saw him sticking his head out from between the car I was trying to hop and the one in front. "Jump up!"

Well, I gave a jump and for a second my foot got hold of the iron loop and I thought I was all right. Then I could feel myself slipping. Everything was so wet!

I gritted my teeth and pulled myself up for all I was worth, but still I was slipping and I could hear the wheels clanking over the rail joints under me. I knew what would happen if I slipped a bit more. But for the life of me I couldn't seem to pull myself up.

I felt myself going under the wheels!

CHAPTER VI

I LOSE HOPTOAD

EVERYTHING got black all around me. I don't mean the black of night, though of course it was after dark. But even with the rain there were plenty of lights around that railroad yard and on the switch poles. But I couldn't see anything after I started to slip off that freight train and felt myself going under the wheels.

"Hold on, Lanky!" I told myself, like I was talking to somebody else. "If you never held on before hold on now!"

I gripped my fingers around that iron handle as hard as I could. But both my feet had slipped off the iron thing that brakemen use to hop freights with, and I was running along the cinders. I didn't dare let go for fear I'd pitch under the wheels.

Then, all of a sudden, I felt somebody grab me by the legs. Gee! but that was a funny feeling. First I thought it was a brakeman who had seen Hoptoad and me hop the freight and that he was pulling me off to chuck me down the bank. And then a voice yelled in my ears:

"Take a good hold now and jump up when I lift you!"

Gosh, it was Hoptoad!

For a second I couldn't figure where he'd come from for he had hopped the car ahead of me. But as it got lighter—I mean something inside my head seemed to clear so I could see through that blackness better—then I knew what had happened.

Hoptoad, looking out, had seen me slip and he'd dropped off from the bumpers where he was riding and had waited until my car came along and there he was, like a true pal, getting ready to give me a boost up. That's what a tramp pal is—not much to look at maybe, just as I was myself, but right there when you need him.

"Take a good hold now, and jump when I lift you," says Hoptoad again and I caught on. I hadn't let go the iron handle of the freight car and I began to pull up with my arms while Hoptoad lifted on my legs and I stuck my feet in that U-shaped iron that hangs down so brakemen can hop a moving freight.

"Are you all right?" Hoptoad asked as I flashed on past him, for you see the train was going faster all the while and my pal was now on the ground alongside the tracks.

"Yes, I'm all right," I made answer and I pulled myself up safe on the bumpers. But it had been a close shave. If it hadn't been for Hoptoad I sure would have gone under the wheels and this story never would have been printed. Though there might have been a piece in the newspaper about a boy tramp being killed in the freight yard trying to ride the bumpers.

"Jump on, Hoptoad!" I yelled to my pal as I stuck my head out from between the two cars where I was on the bumpers jolting along. "Don't get left!"

"I'm coming!" he says to me and I could see him running along side of the freight which, by this time, was going pretty fast. He was skipping along so as to get going as fast as the train was 'cause in this way, when you hop on, you don't run the risk of having your arms pulled off when you take hold. Not that I'm advising any of you boys to hop freights. Keep away from 'em! They're risky.

I saw Hoptoad reach up to grab the hand-hold of the next car, and then I saw something else that made me feel pretty sick. It was quite light there, for the freight was crossing over to the main line out of the yard and there was lots of switches there with lanterns on so I could see plain.

And I saw a brakeman all of a sudden lean out from between the two freight cars where Hoptoad was going to jump up and that brakeman gave my pal a shove with his foot.

"Get off this train, you bum!" the brakeman yells and he shoved Hoptoad head over heels down the cinder railroad bank which was pretty steep there.

"You let Hoptoad alone!" I yells but I don't believe that brakeman heard me for the engineer blew his whistle just then and it made plenty of noise. The last of Hoptoad that I saw he was

rolling down the cinder bank and then the freight got going so fast that I knew he never could climb up and jump on. It was too late. I had lost Hoptoad.

For a little while I didn't know what to do. It was almost as bad as when I felt myself slipping under the wheels. Then I thought of jumping off myself and going back to see about Hoptoad, though I didn't think he could be hurt much for cinders are soft.

They scratch you a lot, cinders do, when you get chucked off a moving freight, but most generally you don't break any bones, not like when you get kicked off where the bank is made of broken rocks, like some places I've seen in traveling around this country.

But by the time I had my mind made up to jump, the train was going so fast I knew it would be dangerous. So I tried to think of the next best thing to do as I held myself on there sitting on the bumpers of one car with the next car rattling in front of me to beat the band.

"Poor Hoptoad," I says to myself and I was sorry I'd stuck that dead devil's darning needle bug on his pants, for Hoptoad hates bugs, even dead ones. "I wonder if I'll ever see him again?"

We were out of the railroad yards now and it was quite dark again and raining hard. There weren't any switch lights and I was all alone riding a fast freight, to where I didn't know.

It wasn't the first time I'd been alone on my own since I'd ran away from the Rottentown

poorhouse, but Hoptoad and I had got to be such pals that, even in the short time we'd been together, he was like an old friend. I sure hated to lose him.

"But maybe I'll meet him again," I says to myself and that made me feel better. Then I got to thinking of something Hoptoad had said just before we heard those chicken thieves in the barn. He spoke of a town named Rayville that he had once been in. It was near a farming country and he thought maybe we could get jobs there.

"I'll see if I can make Rayville if this freight ever slows down enough so I can hop off," I says to myself. "Maybe Hoptoad will come by the next side-door Pullman express."

I felt better after that and sort of eased myself where I was sitting. But I want to tell you fellows, right now, that no place on freight bumpers is easy to ride on.

I don't know how far I rode nor what time it was. I guess I sort of dozed off and slept, though I didn't let go a good hold I had on one of the ladder rungs that are on the end of every freight car so the brakeman can climb up and down to the top. I had half a notion that the same brakeman who kicked Hoptoad off might come back looking for any other tramps, but he didn't.

Then, all of a sudden, the freight began to slow up after a lot of whistling from the engine. Those whistles woke me up and I looked out. I couldn't see anything, it was so dark, and we didn't seem to be stopping near any town. I wondered what

the freight was slowing up for until I looked ahead and I saw that a swing bridge over a river was open. The train had to wait for the draw.

"This is my chance to hop off," I says and by the time I'd made up my mind to do that the train was at a standstill. It was easy getting off then, except I was stiff from sitting cramped so long on those iron bumpers.

In another few seconds I was walking along the cinders of the railroad tracks. I looked ahead and saw where the swing bridge that had opened to let some vessel go up the river was beginning to close again so the freight could go on. Except for the lights on the bridge and on the engine of the train, it was all dark up front. It was also all dark when I looked back over the way I had come except for the tail lights on the caboose. I was about half way down the length of the long freight.

And when I looked off across the country I could see only blackness, with some trees sticking up here and there. The rain wasn't so hard now. The storm was breaking and there was a moon trying to push its way through the clouds like Hoptoad and I often tried to push our way into a circus tent without paying when there was a crowd. We didn't make out very often at it, though.

"This is no kind of a country to be in," I says to myself as I saw how dark and lonesome it was, with not a house to be seen. "I guess I'd better stick to the freight. Maybe it goes to Rayville,

or some place near there where I can wait for Hoptoad."

So just as the train began moving again, the swing bridge now being closed, I ran along it to see if I could spot an open side-door Pullman. I don't like riding the bumpers or brake rods if I can help it.

Luck was with me. Three cars from where I had hopped on I saw an open freight car and it didn't take me two seconds to jump up, the train only beginning to crawl now and it not being dangerous to hop in. All down the line of the freight cars I could hear the draw bars banging as the engineer took up the slack and then we started off. Only I was riding a lot easier and better now, inside a freight car that had a lot of straw on the bottom.

I started to walk away from the door to get in a corner where I could pile the straw up into a bed and snuggle down to sleep and dry out when, all of a sudden, I stumbled over a body.

Gee, I was scared! I fairly kicked that body stretched out on the freight car floor before I knew what it was and then a voice yelled at me:

"Donner und blitzen! Vot's de madder?"

CHAPTER VII

A FUNNY DUTCHMAN

Just for a few seconds I had the queerest feelings. Some of the feelings were that I'd stumbled over a dead body and kicked it to life. More than one tramp had been found dead in a box car, I'd heard.

Then I had a feeling that here was Hoptoad again and I was that glad I could have hugged him. But I got to thinking there was no way for my pal to have gotten on that freight after he'd been kicked off and down the cinder bank by the brakeman.

"Maybe it's the same brakeman who kicked Hoptoad off laying here to catch me," I thought. "If it is, he's a Dutch brakeman," I says to myself. Well, I was thinking maybe I'd better jump off while the train was moving slow rather than wait to be kicked off when it got to going fast, and I was wondering if I could hide away from the Dutch brakeman in a dark corner of the car when, all of a sudden he spoke again.

"Who is dot herein mit me?"

I knew, then, he wasn't any brakeman.

Of course I admit it could have been a trainman trying to talk like a stage Dutchman, but no railroad brakeman that was going to tackle a

tramp stealing a ride would bother to try any stage tricks. He'd come right at him.

"Who are you?" I asked and just then the freight was passing over the bridge and by the lights strung out here and there along it, that shined into our car, I could see that the man I had kicked awake was no railroader.

He was a short, stocky chap, not much taller than what I was but a lot fatter and bigger. He had a funny round face like the moon and he sat up and began feeling around the floor of the car until he got his hands on a bundle near him. All this I saw in the light of the passing lamps and then it got dark again for we was off the bridge.

"Who vas I, dit you vant to know?" he comes back at me with. Gee, but that Dutchman talked broken and splintered English! Sometimes he would say English words one way and then another.

"Yep, who are you?" I made request of him to tell.

"Maype it vos besser dot you explain who you vos?" he comes back at me with.

"Well, that's fair enough," I answers him. "I'm Lanky Lawson."

"Hanky Lawson?" he says, sort of like he was asking a question.

"Not *Hanky—Lanky,*" I says. "Now what's your name?"

"Hans Knouse," he answered and his voice was as thick as sauerkraut when it's frozen in the barrel. You could hardly cut it with a knife.

"Are you vun off dese railroaters?" he asks me.

"Not me," I says. "So if you're afraid of being chucked off you can pass that up. I guess you're stealing a ride too, ain't you?" I wanted to know.

"You haf it guessed alretty," says Hans Knouse, and he gave a long breath like he was glad to find I wasn't going to make trouble for him. Land knows I had enough trouble of my own, with losing Hoptoad, not to want to make it hard for anybody else.

"Well, I'm in the same boat, or, rather, I should say freight car," I told him. "I'm on the tramp, too. I got five cents. Hoptoad has the other four."

"Hoptoad?" he wants to know and I thought I could see him blinking his funny little pig eyes at me in the dark. "Is dere two of you in here by me alretty den?"

"No, I'm all alone," I answered. "Hoptoad got kicked off. But say, Mr. Knouse," I asked, thinking to speak him fair for I could tell he wasn't a regular tramp, "do you know where this freight goes?"

"It goes by Beanville," was what he told me.

"Beanville," I says and I was trying to think where I'd heard that name before. Then I remembered seeing it on the spare tire cover of that blue and white car from which the fresh lads had chucked banana skins at me and Hoptoad.

"Sure, Beanville!" says Hans Knouse again.

"And where is Beanville?" I asked him.

"Dot is der blace where I lives," he answers.

"Oh," I says and I didn't know much more than at first. But I didn't want to act like Hoptoad and ask so many questions so I kept still for a time, thinking the funny Dutchman might spill some more information. And he did.

"Yes, dot Beanville she is a fine blace alretty," he says. "Und I lives dere mit Matilda."

"Who's Matilda?" I asked, just to be friendly like, not that I much cared. I didn't know, then, what a friend to me Matilda was going to be.

"Matilda iss mine vife!" says Hans Knouse. "Und I vould a favor dake it dot you say noddings to her aboud dis."

"About what?" I asked.

"Aboud me riding in a freight train."

"There's nothing disgraceful in riding in a side-door Pullman," I makes answer. "I've done it lots of times and so has Hoptoad."

"For me it is der virst dime alretty," splutters my funny Dutchman. "Und I vould not now be doing id only I lost all my money."

"Lost your money!" I cuts in with. "Gee, that's too bad! How did it happen?"

"Dot's vot I don't vant Matilda to vind oudt," he says in a whisper—that is as much of a whisper as you can use when you ride in a freight car.

"Well, she won't find out from me, for I don't know her," I replies with a laugh. "It wouldn't take me long to lose all *my* money. A nickel is soon lost," I says.

"Ach! I vish it vos only a knickel I lost!"

said Hans with a long breath like he was somewhere down in a cellar. "More as ten dollars vos it I gambled away! Oh, if Matilda effer vinds it oudt!"

"Ten dollars!" I sort of yells. "I didn't know there was that much money in all the world!" It was more than I ever had hold of all at once, anyhow.

"More as ten dollars," says Hans Knouse. "Listen, my poy, I dells it to you. Goes I to der circus yesterday. It vos in Newton und I haf some friends dere so I dakes mit me some extra shirt und I say to Matilda dot I stay a gouble of days. Dot's all right by her for she is going to wisit some of her friendts. Vell, I hat a good time in Newton, und den I vent to der circus und dere vos a feller dere vot had dree little valnut shells und a little pea."

"I know," I says and I couldn't help smiling for I could see what was coming.

"You know dot feller—dot skallawag?" cries Hans Knouse.

"No, I don't exactly know him but I know the game he played on you—the shell game," I says.

"You know dot game?"

"I know how it's played," I says. "Not that I ever tackled it myself. I've seen too many other suckers caught."

"Dot's vot I vos—a sucker!" says Hans, with another long breath. "So you know dot shell und pea game?"

"Yep. The circus man bet you couldn't tell

under which shell the little rubber pea was; didn't he?"

"Dot's vot he done!"

"And first you guessed it right; didn't you?"

"Sure I dit!" cries Hans. "Say, you vos a schmart poy to know all dot! Vos you dere und seen me lose my money? Und maybe you could tell it to der bolice who dot feller vos."

"No, I couldn't do that," I says, "and I wasn't there. But I might just as well have been for I've seen the same thing played a lot of times. First he let you guess where the pea was, and then he had you bet a dollar that you couldn't do it again, and you did and you won a dollar; didn't you?"

"Py golly, yes!" cries the Dutchman. "I am sure dot you must have been dere to know all aboud it!"

"No," I said, "I wasn't. But after you won a dollar you made a bigger bet; didn't you?"

"Sure I dit! I dought I makes me money enough to pay for my drip to der circus."

"And when you had up all your money the little rubber pea wasn't under the shell you picked up; was it?" I asked Hans.

"No, dot little rubber pea she vosn't dere at all, py golly!" says the Dutchman, slow and sorrowful like. "Und der circus gambler he took in my money and folded up his little board and hurriet avay und eferypody gives me der merry hoo-hoo!"

"Sure they laughed at you," I says. "Half

the men in the crowd were in with that shell game gambler. So you lost all your money?"

"Effery cent! More as ten dollars. So I didn't have any money to pay my fare back home und I crawls in dis freight car, 'cause I know der trains stops by Beanville vere I lives mit Matilda. But don't tell her; vill you?"

"I'll never let a peep out of me," I says. "You were a sport, though you got trimmed, and I'm a sport. Sports should stick together. Anyhow I'm never likely to see your wife, for I'm going on to Rayville wherever that is."

"Dot's der next town to Beanville, past it," says Hans. "Und if you go dere maybe as sometime you come to Beanville. But if you do don't tell Matilda!"

"I won't," I promised and I honestly never thought I'd see the Dutchman's wife. But I did and she—but I'll tell you that when I get to it.

Well, the freight kept rattling along and the Dutchman and I sat there the rest of the night, taking it as easy as we could in the straw. I sort of dried out a little and Hans Knouse had some little grub left in his bundle and we ate that. But we wanted a drink of water more than anything else. Only they don't have ice water tanks in a side-door Pullman.

We talked a little and I got so I could make out his splintered English pretty good. He kept a little shoe store and did cobbling on the side, Mr. Knouse did, in Beanville and he invited me to come and see him.

"But don't mention him before Matilda about der gambling vot I did," he begs of me. "Dot vill be a secret in between us."

"Sure," I says. "A dead secret."

By this time it was getting daylight and Hans, looking out, gave a yell, though not so very loud and says:

"Dis iss Beanville! I got to hop out here. Matilda vill be vaiting for me!"

He grabbed up his bundle. The freight began to slow down and I was wondering if it would do that when it got to Rayville where I wanted to get down when, all of a sudden, a voice yells from over the upper edge of the open car door:

"Get out of there, you bum! Hop off!"

It was a railroad brakeman on top of the car and he was lying on his stomach, leaning over, and looking in and he had a big stick.

"Gee!" I thought. "I'm in for it now!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE OLD LADY'S WIG

"Py golly, mister! Don't shoot me! I'll get off your train!"

Hans Knouse yelled this as the brakeman called out and the Dutchman did it just in time to save my life. Or if not my life he saved me from a good beating. For in another second that railroad man would have swung down off the roof inside the box car and he'd have seen me up in the corner in the straw. But as soon as that Dutchman let out the yell, thinking the brakeman meant him, the railroad fellow looked with all his eyes at my late traveling pal.

And just then Hans gave a leap like a frog and though the train was almost stopped that funny, round, fat little Dutchman didn't know how to jump and he rolled over and over like a ball.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" laughs the brakeman, and if I could have done it safely I'd liked to have given him a good kick same as I did the farmer's hat when he spoiled our fish dinner. For I was afraid Hans had hurt himself falling that way.

But by good luck he hadn't so he picks himself up and limps off across the tracks with his bundle. I wanted to holler good-bye to him and

I guess he did to me, but neither of us dared, for that brakeman was on top of the car yet and he might have spotted me.

I wasn't sure, for a couple of minutes more, whether he had or not, for he stayed there laughing and watching Hans step across the rails to get beyond the yard limits. No railroad men would dare touch him then.

"It's a good thing you jumped when you did, you bum!" the brakeman yells at Hans. "I'd have chucked you off in another minute."

Then I was pretty sure the railroad fellow, in looking into the open door of the freight car from the roof, had seen only Hans and not me and it was Hans he had yelled at. But it didn't much matter for this was Beanville and Hans wanted to get off anyhow.

"But I want to go on to Rayville and see if Hoptoad shows up," I said to myself, keeping well back in the corner of the car where the brakeman couldn't see me.

But, anyhow, he didn't stay there much longer for the freight had come to a stop and there was cars to cut out and others to switch into the train and that made work for the men. So I stayed in my side-door Pullman until the train was ready to go on again. I was glad they didn't drop out the car I was in or I'd have had to get in another or else lay over until night.

But the train was soon on its way and I knew I would soon be in Rayville which was the next big town to Beanville so Hans had said.

"Good-bye, Dutchy!" I said half to myself as we pulled out of Beanville. "I guess I'll never see you again. You were a pretty good skate even if you did lose your money to the shell game man."

But in saying I never expected to see Hans Knouse again it only goes to show that you never know what's going to happen in this world. You wait and you'll see what I mean.

I couldn't help laughing when I thought of how anxious that jolly, funny little Dutchman was that his wife shouldn't find out what he'd done with his money. He was good to me, Hans was, giving me part of his grub, and I made up my mind I'd do him a good turn if I ever got the chance.

"But the best good turn anybody could do me now would be to give me a drink of water," I told myself. I sure was getting thirsty in that car and I didn't see my way to getting a drink until we struck Rayville which might be a couple of hours yet.

So I got to thinking about Hoptoad and trying to guess what had happened to him and I was hoping we'd meet again when I heard the engineer give some toots on his whistle. I guess I must have slept a little for when I looked out the side door I saw we were coming into a good sized town and on a sign in the railroad yards was the name Rayville so I knew I had got there at last.

"I only hope the train slows up so I can jump

off," I said to myself. "I don't want to turn somersets like Hans did."

And I was lucky. For Rayville is quite a railroad town and most freights have to stop there. Anyhow, mine did and when I found it slowing up I watched for a good place and jumped out.

No more had I struck the ground than I heard a yell behind me and there was that same brakeman shaking his stick and shouting:

"Well, I'll be jiggered! There's another of them bums! I thought the Dutchy was the last! Hold on there! I want to see you!" he called to me.

I knew better than to hang around where that brakeman could get his hands on me after I'd been stealing a ride on his train. So I landed on my feet like a cat and ran on. But I couldn't help stopping, when I was far enough off, and I pointed down on the ground between two cars like I was pointing at a tramp riding the rods and I yells:

"Why don't you get that one?"

"Another bum!" yells the brakeman and down he climbs in a hurry. But there was nobody there, of course, and I shouts:

"Who got left that time?"

Gosh, he was mad enough to bite me! But I had got back at him for the scare he gave me and the way he laughed at Hans. And then that brakeman did what I didn't think he'd do. He came running after me and I had to run to get away.

"Gosh!" I thought, "I've done nothing but dodge mad farmers and mad brakemen ever since Hoptoad and I started out together."

I didn't know which way to go for I was still in the railroad yards and there were a lot of men around who would ask nothing better than to catch a tramp, for that's what I was though I was only a boy.

I saw a switch shanty and I dodged around that and as I saw the door open and no one inside I went in, thinking I could hide. Well, I did manage to give the brakeman the slip but a few minutes later in comes the switchman himself and when I got up from where I was crouched behind the stove, which it was lucky there was no fire in, the switchman says:

"What you doing here?"

"Oh, I just stopped in to see what you got for breakfast," I says easy like. I could see he was good-natured and I thought maybe if I jollied him he wouldn't give me away.

"Breakfast, eh?" he says to me and he sort of laughed away down inside himself and I knew I'd struck him right.

"You're just in time," he says, and he reached for a big pail on a shelf. "Now that the freight's in I can eat," and he began to open the pail which, I could see, had a lot of bread and meat and pie and other stuff in it. And I could tell from the sloppy sound in the top part of the pail that there was coffee in that. But mostly I wanted a drink of water and there was a pail with a tin dipper

in one corner of the switch shanty. So I asked if I could have a drink.

"Sure!" says the switchman.

Gosh! Didn't that water taste good!

"Now," he says, "will you have roast beef or fried chicken?" and I could tell by that he was a sort of a joker same as myself. So I said:

"If it's all the same to you I'll have broiled lobster."

"Here you are," he says and he passes me some bread and meat and a piece of pie and poured out some hot coffee into a tin cup that was fastened onto the top, or sloppy part, of his lunch pail.

Well, I never tasted any better breakfast and I was hoping Hoptoad had something as good, wherever he was. I was wondering if the switchman knew who I was and where I come from but I guess he must have guessed. For while we were eating a brakeman came along (it wasn't the one who had chased me) and he said:

"Have you seen any tramps this morning that got off the freight train that just come in?"

And my kind switchman leaned down as if to pick something off the floor, though he hadn't dropped anything that I could see, and he says right back:

"No, I don't see any tramps." He could if he had been looking at me but he wasn't. That switchman was careful of the truth.

"Well, if you see any let me know," says the brakeman.

"I will," my switchman made answer. And when the brakeman was gone my friend says to me:

"What I don't know or see won't hurt me and I have a boy of my own. So if you want to stretch out here and rest a bit I don't mind. I'm in charge of this part of the yard and I don't take orders from any freight brakemen or anybody else about tramps."

"I would like to get a little rest," I said. "I am waiting for a pal of mine who got chucked off—"

"Now don't talk too much!" says my switchman, holding up his hand. "What I don't know I can't tell. Here, stretch out!"

So after I had finished helping him eat his breakfast I laid down back of the stove (there being no fire in it like I said on account of it being summer) and I had a good sleep.

The switchman was gone when I woke up and there was no brakeman around and the freight had gone so I thought it a good time to leave. I didn't want my switchman to get into trouble for doing me a favor.

I knew this place was Rayville, though I'd never been there before and this was the place Hoptoad had spoken of and I judged he'd come here as soon as he possibly could and I'd meet him.

It might be three or four days, though, so I knew I'd have to get some work for I couldn't expect to live on hand-outs all that while. But

I didn't know just what kind of work I could get to do and as it was getting near noon and about time to eat again, I thought I'd better look for a place to get a meal so I would be strong enough to work in case anybody wanted me to.

So I wandered off along some streets near the railroad and I made up my mind I'd better stick around the yards for there was no telling when Hoptoad might drift in. He might catch the next freight after the one I came in on.

I spotted a cosy little house with a lot of flowers in the yard and I knew a kind lady must live there 'cause 'most always folks that love flowers are kind. So I went around to the side entrance and I thought if I saw anybody I'd offer to weed the flower beds like I'd done at the poorhouse. Only I could see these flower beds didn't need weeding. They were well looked after. Still it wouldn't do any harm to offer.

All of a sudden I found myself at a side window of the house and I was looking right in the bedroom of the nicest old lady I ever want to see. She was all dressed up and she had nice, curly gray hair. She looked just like I'd want my grandmother to look if I ever have one, which I don't suppose I ever will.

Just as I looked in I saw the old lady standing in front of the looking glass and she was rubbing something red out of a box on her face. I guess maybe it was red salve for maybe she'd cut herself, though I didn't see any blood.

"What do you want, boy?" she asked me and

she wasn't at all scared at seeing me though I was pretty rough looking.

"I want to weed your flower beds so I can make enough money to get a meal," I said.

"My flowers don't need weeding," says the little old lady, which was the truth.

"Well, I'll do any work you have for a meal," I says, and I could see her fussing away at the red stuff in the box putting some on the other cheek now. I thought it was too bad if she'd cut 'em both. And she must have sized up that I saw what she was doing for she says:

"You go on around to the back steps, boy, and stop looking in my bedroom window and I'll see what I can do for you. I've got to finish putting something on my face," she says, "to keep it from blistering."

"Oh," I says quick like, "blistering."

"Yes," she says. "At first sight you might think I was using powder like some women I know, but I don't do that. I can't bear folks that powder their faces and use a lot of artificial things to make themselves look young and pretty. But I don't see any harm," says she, "in putting stuff on to keep the sun from blistering."

"I don't, either," I says, and then I went around back hoping she would give me some work to do or something to eat for I was hungry.

Pretty soon that nice old lady with the gray curls came to the back door and her cheeks were nice and red, though one was redder than the other I thought.

"Do you really want to work, boy?" she asked me.

"I sure do," I says.

"Well," said she "there's something you can do. Get that pole and I'll tell you what you can do."

She pointed to a pole standing up against a tree and I thinks: "Gosh! I wonder if she wants me to go fishing with her, which I wouldn't mind doing at all. But when I took the pole and came back to where she stood near the steps I noticed that the wind was sort of lifting up those gray curls on her head and underneath I could see where there wasn't any hair growing.

"I'll bet this nice lady wears a wig and uses powder even though she says she don't," was my thought. And then I thought I'd like to know, for sure, if it was a wig, so I could tell Hoptoad when I saw him.

So I held that pole out in front of me and when I got close enough to the old lady one end of it accidentally sort of touched her gray hair and, by golly! before I knew it I had lifted that wig of gray curls off the old lady's head and there she was with about as much hair on her knob as you'll see on a billiard ball, and her false hair was dangling on the end of my pole.

"Oh, boy! What have you done?" she yells at me.

"I—I'm afraid I have lifted off your wig," I said as polite as I could.

"My—my wig!" yells the old lady, and then

"Oh, boy! What have you done?" she yells at me.

she claps her hand to her bald head and looks at the curls dangling on my pole and she lets out a shriek and starts to run right at me.

Oh, boy! I dropped that pole and began to run as fast as I could for I could see the old lady was mad clear through and no wonder. Folks that wears false hair don't generally like it known.

"Boy! Boy! Wait for me!" she hollers.

But I didn't wait.

CHAPTER IX

I FIND HOPTOAD AGAIN

While I was running down the road to get away from the old lady whose wig I had accidentally lifted off, I was thinking of a lot of things. One was whether I'd ever see Hoptoad again and another was about where I was going to get something to eat.

"I wish I hadn't been so fresh with that fish pole," I said to myself as I legged it pretty fast. For I gave one look back and I could see the old lady still coming after me. She could run pretty fast for her age, though of course I could beat her in the long run. I hadn't really got started yet.

By this time she was out of her gate and was coming after me on the sidewalk, that is as much sidewalk as there was in that country town. And I was wondering what in the world kind of work she was going to give me to do with that fish pole when, all of a sudden, I see the lady from next door at her front gate and she pointed to the bald-headed lady whose wig I had lifted and yelled:

"For land sakes! Miss Peterkin, whatever has happened to your hair?"

With that my old lady, as I might call her, clapped her hands to her bald head and then she seemed to remember that her wig was back in the

yard sticking to the fish pole. I guess she wasn't in the habit of coming out front, or back, either, for that matter, without her false curls. For she gave one yell and then she ran back in her yard quicker than she had run out after me.

Then I knew I didn't have to run any more for that old lady wouldn't chase me, at least not until she had her hair on. So I ducked into the yard just beyond where the neighbor had spoken about Miss Peterkin's hair to see what would happen. There was nobody in that yard, not even a dog, so I was all right.

But I didn't see any flower beds to weed and though the grass was long and needed cutting there didn't appear to be anybody at home in that house, so I didn't stay. I just ducked in to listen and see if I could hear any talk between Miss Peterkin and her neighbor. For I wanted, the worst way, to find out what she was going to have me do with that fish pole. It sure was a puzzle.

"It could have been that she was fond of fishing and never had anybody to go with her until I came along," I says to myself. "But it seems kind of funny. I wish I'd let her wig alone until I'd found out what she wanted me to do with that pole."

However it was too late to be wishing that now so I hung around in that vacant yard a little longer. But I didn't see anything of the old lady with the wig and then I walked on down that village street wondering what I was going to do to get something to eat.

It wasn't more than five minutes after that before I ran into some luck. In some ways maybe I ought to be called "Lucky" instead of Lanky Lawson.

For just as I got in front of a grocery store where the grocer himself was unloading from a flivver a lot of stuff that I guess he got at the freight yard, all at once, he dropped a case of clothespins and they spilled all over the sidewalk.

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" that grocer says.

Right away I saw my chance to maybe make a little money or get something to eat and I calls out:

"Want me to help you pick 'em up, mister?" Those pins sure were scattered all over the sidewalk and there was nobody else around just then but the grocer and me.

"You come along just in time, boy," says the grocer. "I'm terrible busy, 'cause my clerk is sick and I've got to get this stuff unloaded and go back for another load. What'll you charge to gather up those clothespins?"

I sort of figured a second or two and I said:

"If you'll give me a meal of herring, crackers and a can of peaches, and a quarter of a dollar I'll clean up everything and unload the rest of the truck for you."

"That's a fair offer," my man says. "Go to it. I've got to get inside and put up some orders to be delivered this afternoon."

If that grocer thought I was going to pick up every clothespin separate like he was wrong, for

I had figured out a better way than that. I saw where he had some brooms and big scoop shovels outside his store. And while he was inside I just used the scoop and broom to gather up 'most all the pins in about three motions. What was left scattered around I swept up in a heap and then shoveled them into an empty barrel on account of the crate they busted out of being so broken it wouldn't hold the pins.

Then I rolled the barrel of pins into the store and that grocer opened his eyes and stared at me.

"Are all them pins picked up?" he asked me.

"Every last pin is here in the barrel," I says, "and I'm now going to start unloading your truck. You can begin opening that can of peaches."

"Gosh!" he sort of says in a low voice. "You're the quickest thing I've seen around here in a long while. I figured you'd be an hour picking up them pins. How'd you do it?"

"There's tricks in all trades," I says with a wink and I didn't let on how I did it. Anyhow I was getting too hungry to talk for I could smell the herring and brown sugar and codfish and mackerel smells in that country grocery. And those smells always make me hungry.

"Well, I give you credit for it, boy," says the grocer. "And I'll have your meal and quarter ready as soon as you finish."

I made short work of unloading the rest of the flivver and I was carrying in the last box when,

just as I was going in the store and had my back to the street, I heard a voice say:

"Mister, do you want any more help?"

"There's no more help needed here to-day," I says without turning around for I figured it was another tramp lad like myself and I didn't want to be done out of a job. I was sort of thinking I might get more to do in that store if the grocer's clerk stayed sick.

And then I heard a snickering laugh and I almost dropped that box for it was Hoptoad who was laughing. I was sure of it though I couldn't see him on account of having my back turned. I set that box down quick and turned around and it sure enough was Hoptoad. I'd found him again, or he had me, which was about the same thing.

"You working here?" Hoptoad asked me and I saw he had a bundle in one hand.

"Just finishing," I says.

"Couldn't have been much of a job, then," says Hoptoad, "for I figure you haven't been in Rayville long."

"Not long," I says, "but long enough for a few things to happen. When'd you get in?"

"Just now," Hoptoad says. "I caught the next freight after yours pulled out and it was a faster one. We weren't far behind you. I've been wandering around wondering when I'd meet you."

"Well, you've met me now," I says, and I was mighty glad to be with my pal again. "Did you get hurt when you got kicked off?" I asked him.

"Not much," says Hoptoad. "I rolled down easy. Did you have any trouble?"

"I'll tell you when we're eating," I says.

"Oh, then we eat, do we?" asked my pal, and I could tell by his voice that he was glad of it.

"I'll give you half what I'm going to get," I said and I told him the bargain I'd made with the grocer and I let Hoptoad into the secret of the clothespins.

By this time the grocer come out of the back part of the store and when I told him Hoptoad was my pal he said he was welcome to eat with me and he set out plenty of crackers and dried herring and a can of peaches and we sat in the back part of that store and had a grand feast. Boy, I tell you it tasted good! And the grocer threw in some sweet cider, too, for herring are dry eating especially with crackers.

After I got my quarter I asked the grocer if he wanted two good, strong boys to work for him, but he said he didn't on account of his having word a little while ago that his clerk was better and coming back to work later in the day.

Well, Hoptoad and I were both sorry about that, for a grocery store is a good place for boys to work in on account of there being so many things to eat lying all around and most grocers don't care if you help yourself to a little.

"We better walk around and maybe out in the country a ways and see if we can strike a farmer for a job," says Hoptoad, and I said that was all right with me. So we started out feeling pretty

good after that meal. On the way I told Hoptoad how I got into the box car and about meeting Hans Knouse who got off at Beanville.

We asked at two or three places for work but we didn't get very good receptions and once a man ordered us away or he'd have us arrested, though what for I don't know 'cause we hadn't done anything to him.

Then we got pretty well out in the country and we saw a nice looking farm and Hoptoad said we'd better ask there. So we went around to the back part of the house, but we no sooner reached the place than a big man with his face all white, came running around the corner and he had an open razor in his hand.

"Oh, here you are!" he yells at us and he made for me and Hoptoad, waving that razor around his head.

"Scoot!" yells Hoptoad and he and I both scooted!

CHAPTER X

BACK TO BEANVILLE

Hoptoad and I would have got clean away from that man with the razor who was chasing us except that Hoptoad tripped on a honeysuckle vine at the corner of the house and fell. At least I think it was a honeysuckle vine but it might have been ivy.

However that don't matter. Hoptoad tripped and fell and I was so close behind him that I went down too and there we both were in the side path of the house all tangled up and that man coming after us with the razor.

"For cats' sake!" Hoptoad yells, "do something, Lanky!" I could feel him squirming and wiggling under me.

"Do something!" I yells. "Seems to me you did something when you fell and made me fall, too! It's all up with us now," I said for I could hear that farmer, or maybe he was a madman I thought, with the razor coming closer.

"Get off me!" yells Hoptoad. "I want to run!"

"I want to run myself," I let him know and I tried to get up off my pal. But our legs were all tangled and it was as if we were a couple of fish worms in knots when, all of a sudden, I saw that

man leaning down over us and that razor was pretty close to my face and I sort of closed my eyes and then I heard him say slow and easy like:

"What might you boys be wanting?"

Say, you could have knocked me down with a sledge hammer I was that surprised, that is if I wasn't down already. And Hoptoad yells:

"Don't cut us, mister! We didn't do nothing!"

"I didn't say you did, my boys," the farmer says still slow and easy like. "As for cutting you, I don't even want to cut myself when I'm shaving, and that's what I was going to do when I got word you were coming and I hurried around to meet you before you could get away."

"Shaving!" I says in a sort of a fluster.

"Sure, shaving!" he says. "I always shave out of doors at the back steps in summer, 'cause I can see better there." Then I noticed that what made his face look so white was soap lather.

"What made you run?" he asked me.

" 'Cause you come at us with that razor," says Hoptoad getting out from under now that I was off the top of him, our legs having come untangled.

"Land goodness! Well, well!" says the farmer, with a laugh. "Yes," he goes on, "I can see it did look as if I was chasing you with a weapon. But such was far from my thoughts. I had just lathered myself and was about to shave when I heard you were coming and I ran to get you."

"Heard we were coming?" says Hoptoad, puzzled like. "How come?"

"My wife told me," says the farmer, scratching the end of his nose where he had a little dab of lather he didn't need. "She's in the front room, looking out of the window and she hollered to me that you'd turned in the front gate. I didn't want Sim Rollin to get you away from me, so that's why I hurried out, razor and lather and all."

"You sure hurried," I said. "And so did we."

"Did you think I intended you some harm?" the shaving man wanted to know.

"Why not?" I asked him and he laughed again.

"But what I can't understand," says Hoptoad, "is why you were so anxious to get hold of us, anyhow. And who is this Sim Rollin?"

"Oh, he's the farmer next to me and I was afraid he'd hire you away from me," says our man as I might call him. "You see it's this way," and he went on to explain that this was a berry growing section of the country and that berry pickers were in great demand now. Everybody wanted all the hired help they could get and some farmers would watch and when they saw hands going in one place they'd try to entice 'em away by giving more wages.

"I'm short-handed," says Mr. Blanken, which was our man's name, "and when my wife said two hands were turning in here I thought you might be two boys I hired in town this morning who promised to come out here. I was so afraid Sim would get you away from me that I rushed around the house corner, razor, lather, and all."

"We saw you," I says. "But I guess we come to the right place for we want to hire out and if you need hands we need work."

"Ever worked on a farm?" asks Mr. Blanken, rubbing some of the lather off his chin.

"A little," I says and Hoptoad said the same which was the truth.

"Well, then, I'll hire you to pick berries for me," says Mr. Blanken. "But there's one thing —have you got references?"

"I've had the measles," I says not being able to keep away from my joking talk. "And Hoptoad here is just getting over the jaundice. We haven't come down with references yet but we take everything light so you don't need to worry about us being laid up."

That farmer looked at me funny-like for a second or two and then he bust out laughing and said:

"I see you're one of them funny fellows from the minstrels."

"Yes," I says, "but I'm not working at my trade now and picking berries will just about hit me and Hoptoad right."

"I don't know what you mean, talking about me having references and the jaundice," says Hoptoad who was a bit puzzled.

"You don't need to understand," I says, speaking low. "Leave this to me. I think we're in for a good thing here."

"No, but speaking serious now," says our farmer, "I never hire help, even in a rush season,

without references as to good character and all that."

"Oh," says Hoptoad who now knew what references meant. And I says:

"We wouldn't work for anybody unless we furnished satisfactory reference and if you'll give us a day we'll bring you plenty. Say by tomorrow."

"That suits me," says our farmer. "I'll now go back to my shaving and maybe you'll stop and have a bite to eat before you go for your references."

"We just about will," I says and this hit me and Hoptoad in the right spots for we were hungry again like I've mentioned before.

"Go right in the kitchen and my wife will set you out a feed," says Mr. Blanken.

Which Mrs. Blanken did to the queen's taste. She was a nice old lady, something like the one I lifted the wig off, only her hair was real and she didn't have any red on her cheeks. She was like what a mother must be, I imagine, if you know what I mean.

She didn't ask a lot of questions, either, like some women, but let us eat in peace. And Hoptoad didn't talk much on account of that food tasting so good.

Out at the back steps the farmer, with a basin of hot water and some soap and his razor was finishing his shaving. Now and then he talked in through the window at us, telling how hard it was to get help and how he wouldn't take anybody

that came along unless they had references.

"Oh, we'll bring you good references," I says, giving Hoptoad a nudge not to say anything and spoil my game. "We'll be back the first thing in the morning."

And I meant it, too, for the farmer had mentioned the wages he would pay which was two cents a quart for picking berries. I know that doesn't sound like much but if a fellow is lively he can pick a lot of berries in a day and there was food and lodging thrown in so I figured me and Hoptoad had struck it lucky at last.

Well, we bid that farmer and his wife good-bye and thanked 'em for the meal and the farmer was laughing when he thought how funny it was that Hoptoad and I had run away from him thinking he meant to operate on us with his razor.

"It sure was funny!" he says, "when you both fell down!"

"It didn't seem quite so funny, to us," I made answer.

"No," he says, "I s'pose not. But be sure to show up in the morning, boys, and don't let Sim Rollin get you away from me. You're my hired berry pickers soon as you bring references."

"I'll bring 'em," I promised.

When Hoptoad and I were walking down the road a little later he looks at me sort of queer and says:

"What kind of a steer was you giving him, anyhow?"

"How do you mean?" I asked.

"About references—papers that say we're all right. Where are we going to get references around here where nobody knows us from the side of sole leather?"

"My friend Hans Knouse will give us references," I says.

"Hans Knouse?"

"Sure, the cobbler from Beanville—him I met in the box car that lost all his money gambling, but don't tell his wife."

"Oh, Hans Knouse," says Hoptoad. "Well, that may be all right for you, but what about me? He never saw me."

"He doesn't have to," I said. "Hans Knouse knows me for we have eaten and traveled together and are good friends. You are a pal to me and if I tell Hans to give you a reference he'll do it same as he would for me."

"Oh, so that's the way of it," says Hoptoad, with a laugh.

"Sure," I answered. "So the best thing for us to do is to get back to Beanville, see Hans and get references. Then we can come here and get plenty of work. What about it?"

"That sounds good to me," Hoptoad says. "So we better go down to the railroad yard and see about a train to take us to Beanville. If we had known about this we could have stopped off when we passed through Beanville a little while ago. But it isn't far back there."

So we went to the freight yard as it was now getting on toward supper time, but we figured we

wouldn't eat again until we got to Beanville by a side-door Pullman, for we'd had quite a lot to eat that day and we now had thirty-four cents, counting the quarter the grocer gave me for picking up the clothespins.

It didn't take us long to find out that along about dark a freight going to Beanville stopped at the Rayville water tank to give the engine a drink. The tank was at one end of the yard and Hoptoad and I hid there among some weeds waiting for the freight to come along.

Which it did and we didn't have any trouble at all hopping into a gondola. A gondola is a car about half as big as a box car and it has no roof to it and the sides are about three feet high. They're good cars to ride in when it isn't raining for there's plenty of light and air and you can hop in and out of them easy.

Hoptoad and I got aboard the freight train when it stopped for water and we thought nobody saw us but there is where we were wrong. For when the train was pulling through Beanville after dark, and we knew by the way it was going that it wasn't going to stop, all of a sudden a brakeman jumps down into our gondola from the top of a freight car next to it and he comes rushing at us with his lantern on his arm and yelling:

"Stealing a ride, are you! Well, I'll make you pay!"

He rushed at us and he was ugly. But I let go with my foot and kicked that lantern so hard it busted and then he couldn't see us so plain. At

the same time I scrambled over the side of the gondola for I could tell we had to jump for it if we were to get off at Beanville that trip.

So I jumped and found myself rolling over and over down a cinder bank. At the same time I heard Hoptoad jump and then I heard him yell:

"Oh, Lanky!"

I didn't know what had happened to him, but I was afraid it was something terrible. Anyhow we were back in Beanville though I was worried about Hoptoad.

CHAPTER XI

THE RESCUE OF HANS

"HOPTOAD!" I sung out to him as I picked myself up off those railroad cinders. "Hoptoad, are you dead?"

"Dead?" he asked me right back again. "No, I ain't dead. If I was dead how could I talk to you?"

Well, of course he couldn't, but I didn't say so at the time, 'cause I was so glad Hoptoad was alive. It was just like I told you. My pal sure could ask a lot of questions.

By this time the freight train had pulled on and I hope that mean brakeman who made us jump off in such a hurry gets hurt himself some day in making a jump. And my eyes were sort of getting used to the dark. Anyhow there was a light on a switch not far off and I could see Hoptoad limping toward me and his feet were making funny noises like a pump sucking when the well is almost dry.

"If you ain't killed what is the matter?" I wanted to know.

"I landed in a puddle of water when I jumped off," says Hoptoad, "and first I thought I was going to drown, but it wasn't so deep as I thought. That's why I yelled."

"Oh," I said and then I knew why Hoptoad's feet made such funny noises—his shoes were half full of water and went plop-plop when he walked.

But anyhow he wasn't hurt and I wasn't either except we were both pretty much shaken up and sort of full of cinders.

"So this is Beanville; is it?" Hoptoad says as we started to walk along the track looking for a place to strike off and find the town itself.

"Yes, that must be it," I said and I pointed to where we could see some lights in houses and stores, for it was early yet. "And if we could find Hans Knouse now maybe he'd give us something to eat."

"He doesn't need to," Hoptoad says. "And, anyhow, it's best to call on a man for references in the morning and not after dark. It makes it look like you was in too much of a hurry and maybe he wouldn't give 'em to us."

"I think Hans will give me anything he can, on account of me keeping quiet about him losing his money at gambling," I said. "But anyway what did you mean about him not having to give us anything to eat? I'm hungry," I said.

"So am I," says Hoptoad. "But the reason your friend Hans doesn't need to give us anything to eat is because I have it here myself," and he held up the bundle he had jumped off with.

"What is it?" I asked and I didn't laugh or make a joke at Hoptoad for I remembered about the bacon and salt.

"This," says my pal, "is some more bacon and

a hunk of cheese and some crackers and if we make a fire we'll fry the bacon, toast the cheese and have almost as good a supper as Hans Knouse could give us."

"More bacon," I says, surprised like. "And cheese?"

"Not forgetting the crackers," says Hoptoad, "and they ain't fire crackers either though pretty soon I hope we'll be eating them by the fire."

"Where'd you get 'em?" I asked for we were now walking along a sort of vacant lot beside the railroad bank.

"I got 'em in that store where you got the job picking up the clothespins," Hoptoad makes answer to me.

"You had a bundle when you showed up there," I reminded him.

"Yes," he says, "I had a bundle, but it didn't have no bacon or cheese or crackers in it. There was just some clean shirts and things I got after I got chucked off the freight when you went riding on. A railroad man in the yard give 'em to me and there's an extra shirt for you if you need it."

Well, I sure did need a clean shirt and I told Hoptoad so and then I said:

"I don't see how you got stuff to eat in the grocery where I was working when you come along. I hope," says I, "you didn't lift it." For by "lift" it I meant taking it without paying though I was pretty sure Hoptoad wouldn't do that.

"No," he told me, "I earned it. After I got

through eating I went around back while you were still putting away crackers and herring. The grocery man was out there and I saw where a lot of boxes and barrels were all scattered around.

"I told him if he'd put me up a little snack of bacon and cheese and crackers I'd slick up his back yard for him and I did, while you were still feeding your face and that's how I come by it. I wrapped it in my shirt bundle and if we can find a jungle around here we'll soon have a fire and be eating."

"A jungle," I come back at him. "Do you think this is Africa?" for I'd read in school, what little time I went, about African jungles.

"I don't mean that kind of a jungle," Hoptoad makes answer. "A place where tramps have a camping place near a railroad is called a jungle. 'Most always they leave a sort of stone fireplace there and some tin dishes to drink out of and cook with. So if we can find the jungle, and it looks like there ought to be such a place here, we will be all set."

By this time the moon had come out from in back of the clouds and we would see pretty good. And by golly! If Hoptoad didn't find the jungle just like he said! He was smart in some ways, Hoptoad was.

"Here it is," he says, "and there's nobody here. We'll have the camp to ourselves."

The moon shone down on a sort of hollow in among the weeds and trees not far from the rail-

road track. It was a regular tramp camp, with a fireplace made of stones and some dishes made from tin cans hung up on tree branches and they were clean, too. There was a spring of water near by and some dry wood in a box.

"That's the way with real tramps," says Hoptoad, and I knew it was. They always leave a jungle ready for the next party to come along and Hoptoad and I was the party.

Well, we had a drink and then we washed in the spring, I don't mean exactly in it, but with water from it and Hoptoad took off his muddy shoes and stockings and washed them and then we got a fire going and put on the bacon to fry and the cheese to toast.

I've had lots more fancy meals than the one Hoptoad and I ate then, but none tasted any better. It was fine sitting in the tramp jungle with the moon shining down and smelling that cheese and bacon.

We ate all we wanted and saved some for breakfast for Hoptoad said maybe Hans Knouse wouldn't be as friendly as I thought he would. And then we found where the tramps had rigged up some old piano boxes for a place to sleep and Hoptoad and I crawled in there and pretty soon we didn't know anything 'cause we were asleep.

The sun was shining fine next morning when we woke up and we had another wash and Hoptoad and I each put on a clean shirt and washed our old ones and hung them up to dry which they soon did. The clean shirts was those the railroad

man had given my pal and they came in mighty handy.

"I guess we'd better cook the rest of the bacon and cheese and eat our crackers for breakfast," says Hoptoad while we were waiting for the washed shirts to dry. " 'Cause maybe it will take us a little while to find this Hans Knouse of yours."

"Yes," I said, "maybe so," and then we ate some more—all that was left to tell you the truth —and we felt pretty good. We even had coffee, for Hoptoad went snooping around the jungle and he found where the tramps had hid a coffee pot and some ground coffee and there was even condensed milk, but no sugar. So we boiled a pot of coffee and drank it out of old tin cans and then we washed up all the tin dishes most of which was made from tin cans and left 'em all clean for the next party. I scrubbed the grease off the bacon and cheese tins with sand and washed them in the spring. Tramps aren't all as dirty as you might think. Anyhow Hoptoad and I liked to be clean.

"Now we're ready to find Hans Knouse," I said.

"I'm with you," says Hoptoad.

It didn't take us long to get from the tramps' jungle to the town of Beanville. I've seen bigger places and I've seen smaller places. It was a right nice little village and as we were walking down the main street I nudged Hoptoad and pointed across the way and said:

"Look!"

"At what?" my pal wants to know.

"That garage," and I pointed to one that had the name on—KRONE. Then I said: "Don't you remember that blue and white car where the two boys chucked banana skins at us when we were trying to get away from the storm?"

"Sure I remember!" says Hoptoad and I could see he was still mad at those fellows.

"Well, they got their spare tire at Krone's garage," I says, "and Krone can likely tell us who owns the car and who those lads were and maybe we can get even with 'em!"

"By golly! That's right!" says Hoptoad, and he was going across the street to talk to the garage man when I saw another sign on a place just ahead of us and I gave a little yell and says:

"We've found him!"

"Who?" asks Hoptoad.

"My friend Hans Knouse," I says and I pointed to a sort of shoe store and cobbler's shop with the name on a sign over the door.

"Well, luck is sure with us!" Hoptoad says. "Which will we tackle first, the garage man to find out whose those fresh lads were or the cobbler?"

"Let's go see Hans," I said, "for it may take him a little time to write out those references so we can get jobs with the farmer."

"You're right," Hoptoad agrees and we crossed the street to go in the shoe shop.

Well, as soon as we got to the door we heard Hans yelling:

"Oh, don't! Please haf mercy! Don't do it!"

We couldn't see him on account of him being in the back part, but we could hear that poor little old Dutchman plain.

"I guess it's robbers after him!" says Hoptoad.

"Maybe," I agrees. "And we'd better—"

Just then Hans yells again:

"Oh, don't! I beg of you, don't!"

"We got to save him!" I says to Hoptoad and he picked up a thing to measure feet with and I grabbed a stool and we rushed to the rescue of Hans Knouse.

CHAPTER XII

WE ARE TAKEN IN

When Hoptoad and I got around a partition that separated the shoe store part of the place from the room where Hans did cobbling on the side, Hoptoad and I saw right away we didn't have to fight any thieves and we didn't need the shoe measure thing and the stool we had picked up.

For the trouble with Hans Knouse was his wife and she had hold of his hair, and a good hold, too, and he was down on his knees begging her not to pull it so hard and her all the while yanking harder and her face about as cheerful as a tombstone.

"Don't, Matilda! Don't!" begged Hans. "Stop id!" And then he let out a string of German so that neither Hoptoad nor I knew what he was saying.

Then Matilda comes back at him in German and she shook him, still holding onto his hair, until if he had had false teeth they would have been shook right out of him.

Then Hans looks up and he sees me and Hoptoad. Of course he didn't know my pal but Hans knew me right away and he said:

"Oh, Lanky, can't you do somedings by me alretty?"

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"You should your own pizness mind alretty yed!" sings out Matilda and her face looked more tombstony than ever. "I can attend by mine own husband!" she fires at me.

"But what has he done?" I asked for up to then neither Hoptoad nor I knew what the row was about.

"He gifs all his money to dose painted circus ladies! Dot vos what he hass done!" cries Matilda, and then I knew she'd found out about the money Hans had lost though I could see she didn't have the right of how it got away from him.

Hans give me a look that I knew meant for me not to tell on him and then he let out a yell, for his wife took an extra good hold on his hair and was pulling to beat the band. And just then I sings out:

"Have mercy on that noble man! He tried to put sixteen thieves into the lockup to keep them from getting his money but they was too strong for him. It wasn't his fault that he lost his money."

"Vasn't it?" Matilda asks and I could see she was easing up a bit on her husband's hair.

"No, it wasn't," I said and in a way it was the truth. For when one of those thimble riggers or pea shell game men gets after a fellow they're so slick they can make him bet his money away before he knows what he is doing. So it isn't

exactly his fault. "Your husband is a brave man and you shouldn't blame him," I yells.

I could see what I said was making Matilda wonder and Hans himself, though he opened his eyes wide, played into my hands.

"Dot's right, vot Lanky says," he spills out.

"Do you know dese poys?" Matilda wants to know.

"I know him," says Hans and he points at me. "But de odder vun—"

"This is my pal, Hoptoad," I says. "We come to you, Mr. Knouse, because you know me and now you know Hoptoad and we'd like for you to give us references so we can work for a farmer in Rayville."

"Good references I should give you," says Hans, "but how can I ven mine vife von't let go mine hair?"

"Why don't you let that hero go?" I says to Matilda.

"Hero?" she asks me, and her fingers eased off a bit.

"Sure, a hero!" I says. "If you could have seen him fight those robbers to save his money—"

"Oh, he fought mit roppers; dit he?" asked Matilda.

"Sure, sixteen of 'em," I says. While I was at it I thought I might as well lay it on thick. I didn't mean exactly to tell what wasn't so and later on I figured I'd get Hans to tell her the truth when she had cooled down a bit. But just now something had to be done to save Hans.

"Have mercy on that noble man!" I cried.

"Und he tried to put 'em in chail?" Matilda wants to know.

"That's what he did," I says, tipping a wink to Hoptoad so he wouldn't spoil the game. "But they beat him!"

"Yah! Dey beat me!" chimes in Hans. "Oh, it was derrible! Und dey takes all mine moneys! I vos afraid to dell you, Matilda, ven I come home last night and ven you found it oudt, vell, you didn't gif me no chance to explanation it by you."

He was talking now what I guess he thought was English, but it was badly bent and twisted. But he wanted Hoptoad and me to understand how things stood.

"I let you go mit der circus," says Matilda, "und give you money from our savings und you come home late at night und you iss all dirt."

"From riding mit der freight train 'cause I had no money for a ticket left," says Hans. "Der sixteen robbers by der circus took der money from me."

"Poor Hans!" says Matilda and then I knew she was won over. But I wasn't through yet and I laid it on thick how Hans had done his best not to lose his money but how the robbers were too strong for him and what a fight he had and all that until by golly! I begun to believe the thing myself.

And Hans sure must have believed it for he puffed himself out after his wife let go his hair, and he got up on his feet and I guess to this day

he thinks he's a hero on account of what I said.

"That was a pretty slick story," Hoptoad says to me, him knowing the truth of what had happened. He spoke in a whisper while Matilda had gone back to her kitchen and Hans was combing his hair in the back of the shop.

"It was the only way I could save him," I said.

And when Mrs. Knouse was rattling away with her pots and pans, Hans took Hoptoad and me into the front part of the store and he shook hands with us and said to me:

"Lanky, I shall never forget vot you dit for me. How can I ever repay you?"

"By fixing up some references for Hoptoad and me so we can get work with that farmer," I says. "But first tell me how did your wife find out about you losing the money?"

"She keeps track of every penny she lets me have," he said, "und when she got counting up after I got back from der circus she sees where I was short and she saw by my dirty clothes dot I come on der freight und she gets asking questions. I am so busy dot I don't begin to answer dem until dis morning und all of a sudden she gets mad und comes at me saying I haf der money hid."

"And we come in just when the argument was getting hot," I says.

"It sure vos hot!" says Hans, rubbing his head. And he looks at me and sort of winks one eye and asks: "Vos you sure dere vos sixdeen roppers?"

"Oh, sure," I said and then we all three laughed but not so Matilda could hear. That German lady was all right when she wasn't arguing or scolding Hans and I guess he put up with it for she was the best cook I ever saw. And I'll tell you how I found out.

Hans thanked us again for making him such a hero and saving all his hair from being pulled out and then he asks me:

"Vot is dis you say aboudt vanting references so you can go to work by a farmer in Rayville?"

So I told him all about the man with the razor and how Hoptoad and I figured on going back to Rayville to get jobs when Hans says:

"Vot's der matter by staying here?"

"Staying where?" I comes back at him.

"Here in Peanville," he said though he meant Beanville. "It iss a goot town," he says, spilling his words all over, "und you poys could vork here yet alretty."

"But we might have to wait a week before anybody would hire us," I said, "and how would we live while waiting? Whereas we are sure of a job as soon as we strike Rayville if you give us references."

"I could do dot for you, mit pleasure," said the kind old cobbler, "but you should not worry about living while you are looking for jobs. I got a job right here for one poy und I guess der odder vould soon find a place," and he looked at Hoptoad.

"But it's taking a chance," says my pal. "We don't want to starve."

"You shouldn't starve alretty yet," says Hans.

"Why not?" I asked him.

"Because I will take you in here to lif mit me und Matilda until you both get vork," he says, "und as I said I can give one of you a job right now. So you won't starve."

"You mean we can live here?" I asked.

"Sure!" says the kind old chap. "Ve got lots of room und Matilda she iss a goot cook!"

From the smells that began to come in then from the kitchen I would broadcast that she was. Hoptoad and I looked at each other.

"Shall we stay?" I asked him.

"Sure!" he says. "You take the job here, Lanky, and I'll look for another."

"Dot's it!" says Hans. "You vill get a job easy if I say you are a friendt of mine und I vill. Und now it iss time to eat, I dinks me."

Just then Matilda sticks her head out of the kitchen door and she was all smiles now, like an alligator when he gapes, and she says:

"Come und eat!"

Well, I started for that room fast but all of a sudden Hoptoad looks out of the window and yells:

"There they are now!" and he makes a bee line for the door.

CHAPTER XIII

I GET A SURPRISE

For a few seconds I didn't know what to make of Hoptoad, running out just when dinner was ready. First I thought he'd seen some of the railroad men after us, or maybe that farmer whose hat I kicked into the river.

But when I looked down the street I saw Hoptoad chasing a blue and white auto and I knew what the game was. He'd seen the same machine that had those fresh kids in it that threw banana skins at us and then laughed.

But Hoptoad might just as well have tried to catch an express train by the tail and I guess he found it out for pretty soon he came back, all out of breath, and he says:

"They got away!"

"Who?" says Hans. "If dey vos friends of yours ve vill vait for dem, or dey can haf somedings to eat ven dey comes back."

That was Hans all over. As good and kind and generous a man as you'd meet in walking down the longest road without any turn in it.

"No, they wasn't any friends of ours," says Hoptoad. "Quite the other way. Do you know who in this town owns a blue and white auto?" he asked the cobbler.

"I don't pay much heed py automobbubbles," he says. "Matilda und I valks vere we vants to go. Und chust now I vants to go und get somedings to eat. Come along, poys!"

"We'll find out, maybe over at Krone's garage later, who owns that auto," says Hoptoad in a whisper to me as we go out to the kitchen. It kept smelling better and better all the while.

"You poys can vash mit yourselves in dere," says Matilda pointing to a sort of bathroom off the kitchen and though Hoptoad and I had washed once that morning in the jungle we didn't kick at doing it again. Especially when we were getting a free feed.

Well, we slicked up and combed our hair and with clean shirts on we didn't look so bad and Hans showed us where to sit at the table and he was just going to squat down himself when his wife looks at him and her face got sort of tombstony again and she says:

"Hans Knouse, vos you about to sit down dot vay?"

"Vot vay?" he asked, innocent like.

"Mit your hair not combed any better den vot it iss!"

Well, his hair was a little mussed in spite of him having used a comb on it in the shop. And I figured that as his wife had mussed it she shouldn't make such a fuss. But she pointed to the room where we had slicked up and Hans marched in meek as a spring lamb.

Matilda herself was as neat as a pin—yes, as

neat as a whole paper of pins—and I guess she wanted everybody else the same way. I could see, right away, that she ought to have wore the pants in that family instead of Hans. But he didn't seem to mind being ordered around. Maybe he figured that such a good cook as his wife was had a right to order folks around.

Anyhow she did, him and me, too, later on.

But, oh, boy! How Matilda could cook.

It was quite a while before Hoptoad and I got through eating, there was so many good things on the table. And our pants felt tight when we got up.

"We sure struck it rich when you fell in with Dutchy," says Hoptoad to me in a low voice and after that "Dutchy" was all he ever called Hans when he spoke of him. But to his face he said "Mr. Knouse," of course.

"Hans is one grand man," I says and I meant it. What if his wife was a scold and made him mark time and kept track of every cent he spent? Lots of women do that and they can't even boil water for tea so it has any taste to it. I guess Hans knew which side of the butter his bread was on.

After dinner Hans smoked his pipe and waited on a few customers that came in to buy new shoes and Hoptoad and I sat around wondering what would happen next to us, but feeling glad we had struck Beanville. For neither of us cared much about going back to work for that farmer in Rayville.

Then Hans comes to me and says:

"Could you mind der store while I work in the back shop mending shoes?"

"I could mind the store all right," I says, "but will the store mind me and do what I say?"

"Ha! Ha! Dot's pretty goot!" Hans lets out a laugh. "Make der shop mind you! But dis iss vot I means," he explains. "Vile I am in der back and a gustermor comes in you should call me und I comes in und sells a pair of shoes."

"Yes, I can do that," I says.

"Und after a vile," goes on Hans, "you vill der business learn und sell shoes vile I mends der old vuns."

"Yes, I hope I can," I says and I began to feel a lot happier for I could see a chance where I could amount to something in this world and not be just Lanky Lawson, a boy from nowhere.

Then I got to thinking of Hoptoad and I said:

"It's too bad you don't need two boys, Mr. Knouse."

"Two boys iss more as I should need for a long time in my pizness," he says. "But I know where Hopfrog, as you call him, can get a place und it's right in town here. I just heard about it."

"Where's that?" asks Hoptoad, never minding about being called a frog in mistake.

"Ham Doolittle, der grocery man, vos here just a couple of minutes ago," says Hans, "mit some dings mine vife ordered. Und Ham says by me does I know of a boy he can hire 'cause

his boy iss no good on account of always quitting work to go fishing. So if Hopfrog, as you call him—"

"Hoptoad, not Hopfrog," I sings out.

"Vell, frog or toad it don't much matter," says Dutchy, "but if Hoptoad vould like to work by Ham Doolittle I would a reference gif him for der chob."

"There's nothing I'd like better than to work in a grocery store," says Hoptoad. "And if it's in this town so much the better for I wouldn't want to leave Lanky."

"You von't have to," said Hans. "If you liked you could lif here by me und Lanky. But Ham he has a room in his store where der poys he hires always lives und I dinks me he would vant you to stay dere, Hopfrog—I mean toad."

"That suits me," says my pal. "I can come and visit Lanky at night."

"Sure!" says Hans with a grin. "Der more merrier der better!"

So that's how Hoptoad and I both got jobs in Beanville, me in the cobbler shop and Hoptoad in Ham Doolittle's grocery. For the grocer took Hoptoad after Hans spoke to him and so we were all set and better off in life than Hoptoad had been since he ran away from his uncle and since I left the poorhouse.

It was toward the end of summer when Hoptoad and I had these adventures that I've been telling you about. And after we got our jobs nothing much happened for a few days. I worked

hard to learn the shoe business and Hoptoad buckled down to the grocery like he was going to turn it inside out. He was glad to get a job and so was I. And I got more than a job. I got a big surprise about a week after I started to live with Hans and Matilda.

One night Hans says to me, after I'd helped him quite a lot in the store waiting on customers and even helping with the shoe mending; Hans says:

"How vould you like to go by school, Lanky?"

"School?" I says. "What do you mean?"

"Educationess is a grand thing," says Hans. "Der more of it a poy hass up to a certain point der better off he iss. You are young. You need some more learning und so Matilda and I haf decided dot ven der fall term opens you shall to school go." He looks at his wife as he says this and she says:

"Dot's right."

Hans never did anything without looking at his wife or talking to her about it. But her cooking made up for all that.

"I sure would like to learn," I said. "But what about the store?"

"Most of my pizness iss done late afternoon und evening, I mean py der selling of new shoes," says Hans. "Und you can vait on der store den, after school und Saturdays."

"That's fine!" I says and I was hoping there was some way Hoptoad could go to school. But he said later he had all the education he wanted.

School wouldn't begin for several weeks yet and meanwhile I worked away in the shoe store. Some funny customers came in. I got so I could wait on the children, getting new shoes out of the boxes. One day there was a nasty little imp of a red-haired girl come in and not a shoe I got for her suited. She even kicked one shoe off right in my face.

I didn't say anything but I made up my mind I'd get even. There was a mouse trap in the back of the store and that morning I saw a live mouse was in it. So I pretended I had a pair of shoes in the back of the shop I thought would fit this kid and I took a pair with me and in one I put the live mouse.

"Try these on," I says to the red-haired girl and I handed her the shoe with the mouse in. She put her foot down inside and then things began to happen.

CHAPTER XIV

WE FIND OUT SOMETHING

"THERE's something in this shoe!" yells that red-haired girl as soon as her toes begin to feel that mouse wiggling. "Oh, there's something in this shoe!"

She began dancing around on the one foot that hadn't any shoe on, and trying to kick off the one with the mouse in, like she had done before when the flying shoe nearly hit me.

"Oh! Oh!" she yells. "There's something in this shoe!"

"Yes, miss," I says as polite as I could. "Your foot is in it. But if it don't fit—"

"There's something else than my foot in this shoe!" she yells again. "Oh, mamma!" And then she kicked the shoe off and the mouse ran out and the mother screamed and got up on the bench and so did the red-haired girl that was such a pest and she yelled louder than ever.

"Vot's der matter here?" asks old Hans, coming out from his cobbler shop and when he saw the woman and girl up on the bench and when he sees the mouse making a bee line for some place to hide even the old Dutchy himself couldn't help smiling.

"How dare you sell me shoes with a mouse

in?'' sings out the red-haired girl, glaring at me.

''I didn't expect to *sell* you the mouse,'' said I. ''I would have throwed that in for a *bargain* if you had bought the shoes.''

''Think you're smart, don't you?'' says the girl and with that she and her mother got down off the bench and stopped screaming because the mouse was gone and there was no more danger. There never had been any danger, but you know how it is with girls and mice.

They went out of the store with their noses in the air and I didn't even offer to put that red-haired girl's old shoes back on her like I would have done for a decent customer. When they were gone Hans looked at me and said:

''Dit you put dot mouse in der shoe?''

''Yes,'' I said, ''I did.'' I wasn't going to lie out of it, for even if I got fired I figured it was worth what I did because that snip of a red-haired girl sure was nasty. She was old enough to know better, too, being about fourteen. If she had been a little kid I wouldn't have taken a chance on scaring her with a live mouse or a dead one either. But she got my goat.

''So! You put der mouse in der shoes?'' asks Hans, and then he began to laugh and he kept on laughing and I knew I was safe. For he said: ''Don't let it be known but among you und me, but I'm glad you did dot. For dot girl she makes always trouble for me. She comes in lots of times und tries on shoes but she never gits suited

and den she goes py der odder store which is kept by Jakey Levy und she gits shoes off him."

"I guess you're glad I put that mouse in her shoe then," I said.

"Sure I am!" Hans says, with a laugh that wasn't very loud, for his wife was in the kitchen. "But don't tole Matilda und don't tole dot red-headed girl or her mudder."

"I'm not likely to," I said.

So that's the way things went in Beanville after Hoptoad and I got there. I don't mean I was always playing tricks like that for you don't get, every day, mean red-headed girls to fit shoes on. And if Hoptoad played any tricks in his grocery he never said anything to me about 'em.

All this while I was getting on pretty well with Hans and Matilda. I liked those Dutchies a lot and I guess they liked me. Anyhow, Hans did for I sort of saved all his hair from being pulled out by his wife when she was mad at him for losing his money. But after what I had told she seemed to think more of him. Though that didn't stop her scolding now and then and ordering him around like she was the boss, which I guess she was. But as I said, her cooking made up for that.

It was about a week after that trick with the mouse that Hoptoad and I got half a day off on account of both of us having worked pretty hard and there being a sort of holiday in town, everybody, 'most, going to a church picnic which didn't

leave many people in town to buy shoes or groceries. So Hoptoad and I went on a bus ride to the next town, which was called by the name of Glendale. We had a little money, 'cause we were earning wages now, though not big ones, and we thought we would have something to eat.

"This looks like a good restaurant," I said as we came to one in Glendale.

"It looks all right," Hoptoad says, so we went in.

But it only goes to show that you can't tell by looking in the windows of a restaurant what kind of pie they have. And the other stuff they gave us to eat wasn't anything extra. That cheese and bacon Hoptoad and I fried in the tramp jungle tasted a lot better.

So after we got to the end of the meal and we were still hungry and I said:

"I guess I'll have some pie."

"I'm with you," Hoptoad says.

So we each ordered a piece and then the restaurant man who was the boss and waiter all in one said we might as well pay him now as he was busy and then we could leave when we had finished our pie. Well, we didn't think anything of that so we paid him before we eat the pie and I wish we hadn't for that pie had turned sour and we couldn't eat it.

"What kind of pie is this?" I yelled at the boss when I had to stop eating at the first bite which I couldn't even swallow, it was so bad.

"That's apple pie, like you ordered," he says and he grins in a nasty way.

"It may be apple pie," says Hoptoad, getting rid of his bite, "but what else?"

"Don't get fresh with me!" says the restaurant man. "If you don't like my food get out!"

"The other stuff wasn't so bad as the pie," I says. "So it's up to you to either give us decent pie or the money back we paid for these hunks of junk!" and I pointed to our pie which we couldn't eat at all.

"You get out of here before I throw you out!" says that big brute of a restaurant man. And him being big and powerful, and Hoptoad and I not feeling like a fight then, we got out as he made a rush for us.

Well, we were both pretty mad as you would be I guess, and Hoptoad says:

"He gyped us!"

"That's right," I said, "but I am going to get even with him."

"How?" is what Hoptoad wanted to know.

"You watch," I says.

Not far from this restaurant was a butcher shop and in the window was a wire trap filled with live and buzzing flies. I went in the butcher shop and asked the man cutting meat if I could have that trap of flies.

"You can," says he, "and welcome and there's another in the other window. But you got to bring back the traps and what in the world you want of flies is more than I know."

"I know," I says, "and I'll bring your traps back empty in a few minutes."

So I gave one trap of flies to Hoptoad and I took the other and we stepped inside that restaurant and pulled the bottom out of the traps and let loose about ten thousand flies in that restaurant when the mean boss was at the back end waiting on some telephone linesmen who had come in for a feed.

Gosh you should have seen those flies buzz out and light all over everything, including those telephone men and what they had ordered to eat which I hope wasn't apple pie. Those flies buzzed so loud and made such a cloud that the restaurant man yelled:

"What are you boys doing?"

"Getting even with you," I says, "for charging us for sour pie!"

With that we opened the doors to run out with the empty fly traps. And that man yells:

"You confounded imps! You think you're smart; don't you?"

"Well, there aren't any flies on us!" I give him back with a laugh, and there weren't, for they were all in that restaurant.

As Hoptoad and I ran back to leave the empty traps in the butcher shop, I could hear those telephone men raising a row on account of the flies all over everything and pretty soon they came out and they hadn't been in there long enough to order a meal so that fellow lost some good customers just by charging us for sour pie.

"I guess it's good we don't live in Glendale," says Hoptoad to me after we went on the other side of town and found a place where we could get some decent pie and a glass of milk to finish off our meal with.

"Yes," I said. "I wouldn't want to meet that restaurant man down in a dark alley. He might remember us."

Well, we laughed over my trick on the way back on the bus and that night we went to the movies for we had a little money left and we wanted to finish the day well.

Hoptoad and I were kept pretty busy, but one day I met him down in the village where he had gone on an errand for Ham Doolittle and I was coming back from delivering a pair of shoes for Mr. Knouse. We met right in front of Krone's garage and the same thought came to both of us at the same time.

"Let's see if we can find out who those banana-skin fellows are," says Hoptoad. "I mean the ones that rode in the blue and white car."

"Sure," I said. "This garage man ought to know."

Mr. Krone was a pretty decent sort of fellow and when we asked, without telling him why we wanted to know, who in town owned a blue and white car with one of his spare tire covers in back he said:

"Why, that's Philander Hooker's car."

"Has Philander Hooker any children?" I asked.

"Yes," says Mr. Krone, "he has two boys, Phil and Hiddie."

"What kind of boys are they?" I asked without letting on why I wanted to know. "And what do they look like?"

Well, Mr. Krone described the same two fellows that had thrown banana skins at me and Hoptoad so we knew they were the Hooker kids all right.

"As for what kind of boys they are," says the garage man, "I had rather be excused from saying," and he winked in a way I was wise to.

"You mean their father does business with you?" I asked.

"That's it," he says. "I don't want to lose his trade. But the less you have to do with Phil and Hiddie the better off you'll be."

"We aim to do a little busines with them," says Hoptoad, "but we don't intend to get friendly."

"What does their father do?" says I.

"Everybody!" says the garage man before he thought, and then I knew Hoptoad and I had found out something.

"I mean what business is he in?" I asks.

"Oh, Mr. Hooker does a general business," says the garage man, who looked easier when he saw nobody but Hoptoad and I had heard what kind of a crack he made against the old man. "He's a sort of banker and a promoter."

"Does he promote pupils in school?" I asked.

"Not exactly," says Mr. Krone. "Though Phil and Hiddie go to school here."

That was news to me 'cause I counted on going to school pretty soon and I knew I'd fall in with those fellows. But I didn't say anything about that.

"Mr. Hooker promotes businesses," says the garage man. "Once he promoted a bank here but it didn't pan out very well. Now I understand he's promoting an oil well or something like."

"Well," says Hoptoad, with a laugh, "he can't sell me any stock in an oil well."

"Nor me, either," I says.

But my pal and I had found out what we wanted to know, which was the names of those boys who soaked us with banana skins. And we aimed to get even with 'em. They lived in a fine house just outside the village, Mr. Krone told us.

On the way back, just as I was turning down the street to go to the Knouse shoe shop, I saw, right ahead of me, a man and a boy I knew. I saw them as plain as day and my heart almost stopped beating.

For there was Nick Bladder, the lad I had chucked in the duck pond at the poorhouse, and his father, the mayor of Rottentown, was with him.

"By golly!" I says to Hoptoad, all in a sweat, "I'm done for! There's Nick Bladder and his father looking for me to have me arrested. What am I going to do?"

CHAPTER XV

I GO TO SCHOOL

Hoptoad was good for other things than just asking questions, as I found out right away. No sooner did I speak to my pal about seeing Nick Bladder and his father than Hoptoad pulled me into a doorway where we couldn't be seen and he says:

"How do you know he is after you to arrest you?"

"Well, I don't know how, but I do," I says.

"Bunk!" says Hoptoad. "He hasn't even seen you," which he hadn't, for his back was turned and so was Nick's.

"And what's more," says Hoptoad, "he don't even know you are in Beanville unless you have written him a letter telling him so."

"Not me," I says.

"Then we're all right," says Hoptoad. "And there are two things to do."

"What?" I asked him.

"One is to get away from Nick Bladder and his sweet looking pa," says Hoptoad, "and the other is to make it so he won't hang around Beanville. The first is easy. All we got to do is to slip around the back way. You can go to your

shoe store. Me, I don't have to go anywhere for Nick never saw me."

"That's true," I said.

"And about making Nick wish he hadn't come here, that's up to you," says my pal.

"How do you mean?" I asked and I looked out of the doorway and saw the two pills going slowly down the street.

"Why," says Hoptoad, "we can sneak up back of 'em and right on the corner is Mike's fruit stand. Mike always has a lot of rotten oranges he doesn't want and he'll give 'em to us and we can give 'em to Nick."

"Give 'em to 'em," I says and then I understood. "That'll just suit me," I says. "Come on!"

We didn't lose any time sneaking around through a back alley until we got to Mike's fruit stand. He gladly gave us a lot of soft, rotten oranges and a little later Nick and his father had 'em—right in the back of the neck. Hoptoad was a good straight shot and so was I, and the way those oranges splattered on that bully and his old man was sure pretty! They looked like walking omelets in a second.

"What's this?" yells old man Bladder and he turned around but he didn't see me or Hoptoad 'cause we ducked around the corner.

"Whoo! Look at me!" yells Nick and he sure was a queer sight with orange juice running down all over him. "Somebody played a rotten trick on me!" he sings out, which was true enough.

"I'll have them arrested!" says Mr. Bladder, talking big like he used to when he came out to the poorhouse.

"That's right, paw, have 'em locked up!" sings out Nick. "Oh, look at me!"

He sure was a funny sight, with that orange juice running down all over him. He looked all around to see who fired the stuff at him and his pa but he didn't see me or Hoptoad. Then Nick and Mr. Bladder saw the fruit stand.

"Did you chuck those oranges at me and my son?" asked the Mayor of Rottentown.

"What'sa de matter?" sings out Mike. "You tinka I crazy in de head likea you? G'wan!"

He looked so fierce with his dark skin and black eyes and bristly moustache, Mike, the Dago fruit man, did, that I guess the Bladders didn't want to bother him. So they looked around some more but they didn't see me or Hoptoad and then they saw a policeman.

"Officer," I heard Mr. Bladder say to the constable, "I want you to arrest somebody."

"Who?" asks the constable.

"The rascal who threw rotten oranges at me and my son," says Mr. Bladder.

"And lock 'em up!" cries Nick.

"I will if you tell me who did it," says the constable. "But I didn't see any oranges thrown though I judge some has been throwed by the looks of you two," and he laughs.

"This is no laughing matter," says Mr. Bladder, wiping some juice out of one eye.

"I don't have to ask you when I can laugh," the constable says, for this was Beanville and Mr. Bladder, or Nick either, didn't have anything to say here. I guess they knew it for they went along wiping the orange stuff off 'em and Hoptoad and I went along by ourselves.

The Bladders don't know to this day who chucked those oranges at 'em unless they read this book about my life history. Maybe they will. Anyhow it was no more than was coming to Nick and his father for the way they treated me when I was in the poorhouse. Chucking Nick into the duck pond was only half what I owed him.

For a few days after that not much happened to either me or Hoptoad. I worked in Hans's shop and Hoptoad did what he had to at the grocery. Sometimes I would go down to see him and he would treat me to crackers and herring or maybe a bit of cheese. Ham Doolittle said he could so it was all right.

"I can see now," I said to my pal, "why you'd rather work in a grocery store than a cobbler shop."

"Yes," says Hoptoad, "there are things to eat in a grocery but I guess nobody eats shoes unless maybe they're Arctic explorers that are starving."

By this time I was getting to know Beanville and some of the people in it. I was feeling as if I belonged somewhere now and might get to be somebody instead of being a boy from nowhere. Hans seemed to take quite a notion to me and I

got to like his wife better the more I saw and ate of her cooking.

I heard a lot more, too, about Philander Hooker and his sons Phil and Hiddie. Those fellows sure thought themselves hot sports and they rode around town and went in the drug store and bought girls ice-cream sodas. Hoptoad and I saw 'em, but we didn't speak to 'em or let on we knew they were the pills who had soaked us with banana skins.

"I'll get square with Phil and Hiddie yet," I said to Hoptoad.

Next week I started in at school. There was only one school in town and it took in everybody from little kids to fellows in high.

Of course not having had much schooling while I was in the poorhouse and none at all since I left, I couldn't get in the high school classes. I was in one of the lower grammar grades but I was thankful to Hans for letting me get in even there. I wanted to get to know things and be somebody. I wish Hoptoad could have gone to school but he didn't seem to care about it.

I felt rather strange the first day I went to school, though I was better dressed than I'd ever been before on account of Hans getting me new clothes. So I looked pretty decent, not like a poorhouse boy at all.

I had a pretty nice teacher and when she saw I wasn't quite on to things she showed me and I was getting along fine. But at recess I ran into trouble. I was standing around minding my own

business when up comes Hiddie Hooker—he was the smallest of the two pills—and when he saw me he looked surprised and yells out:

"Oh, look who's here! Anybody got any shoes to mend?" He must have seen me in the cobbler shop. "Here, see if I need a new sole!" he says and he aimed a kick at me. But I grabbed his foot and pulled and sat Hiddie down hard on the ground as neat as a pin.

A lot of the fellows and girls laughed at that and Hiddie let out a yell, and up came running his brother Phil.

"Who knocked you down?" Phil asked Hiddie.

"That shoemaker!" says Hiddie, pointing at me.

With that Phil doubled up his fists and made a rush at me.

CHAPTER XVI

A WILD GOOSE CHASE

THERE are two ways of fighting. One is when both fellows know how to box and are about equal. The other way is when one fellow is pretty good and the other isn't. That last was me for I'd never done much fighting and I could see that Phil had. So right away I knew what I had to do and that was use a trick I'd learned of a tramp I met once on a freight train.

When I saw Phil rushing at me and I knew he was a trained fighter, or boxer, I put my two hands together with the fingers twined and my thumbs crossed and held 'em up in front of my chin. I had two reasons for doing this. One was so Phil couldn't hit me on the chin and knock me out. The other reason I'll tell you in a little while.

"Oh, look at the baby! He's saying his prayers!" says Hiddie with a sneer, getting up from where I had upset his apple cart.

Well, maybe it did look like I was saying my prayers when I had my hands clasped that way. But I wasn't. Not that I don't believe in prayer, but this was no time for it.

"I'll make him say more than his prayers before I get through with him," says Phil and he

was pretty near to me then and all the other fellows in the school yard were coming close to see the fight and the girls were sort of edging away but not so far away, either. Some girls pretend they don't like fighting but I've noticed they always want to know who won.

"I'll teach you to knock down my brother!" yells Phil.

I was going to say that I'd teach him and his brother not to peg banana skins at me and my pal, but I wasn't ready, yet, for that crack. I was saving that.

"He wouldn't have got knocked down if he had kept his feet on the ground where they belong," I says, and with that Phil was near enough to lash out with his fist at me. If that blow had ever landed I would have been counting stars. But it didn't land. I swung to one side like that tramp had told me and then I up with my two hands clenched together, swinging them between Phil's two fists (for he let out with the other one now) and I let him have it right on the point of his chin. It was the hardest kind of a blow, double strength, and it took Phil unexpected. He thought I was going to pray.

The next second Phil went down flatter than his brother had fallen and he stayed down, too, for his senses had left him for the time being.

"Gee! He's knocked out!" says somebody, and that was the truth. My trick had worked fine and it was the first time I had ever tried it. Those doubled up fists of mine, and they were good, hard

fists, too, had landed right on the point of Phil's jaw and he had gone down for the count. It was a beauty of an uppercut, though as I say in regular boxing it wouldn't count, maybe.

There was a lot of excitement for a time and Hiddie was almost crying when he saw his brother knocked out. But Phil wasn't really hurt and as soon as his brain got to working again he sat up, rubbed his chin, and looked around sort of queer.

"You little tramp!" he says to me, getting to his feet. "You didn't fight fair. You used a brick."

"Oh, no I didn't," I said.

"That's right," said some of the fellows. "But he hit you with both fists at once, Phil."

"Both fists at once?" Phil couldn't believe it.

"Sure!' said a lot of other fellows.

"Well, I'll fix him for that," says this pill brother of Hiddie.

He rushed at me again but then the bell rang and some of the teachers came out to get the pupils in line to march back to school, so there couldn't be any more fighting.

There was a lot of talk around the school after that about what I had done and that afternoon when I went home, I looked to see Phil and Hiddie come at me together. I wasn't afraid. I knew there were some sports among the high school fellows and they'd see fair play. But there wasn't any need.

Phil and Hiddie went off together looking at

me about as black as those clouds the time Hoptoad and I ran to get out of the storm. But they didn't say a word.

However, if I thought this was the end of trouble with those Hooker brothers I was shinning up the wrong clothes post. From then on a lot of mean tricks were played on me and though I couldn't say for sure the Hookers were at the bottom, I was fairly certain. They put glue in my ink, smeared my books, put gum on my seat, and tried to lay on me the blame for bringing a dead skunk to school.

I got clear of that, but the Hookers didn't get blamed for it like they should have. And then they found out that Hoptoad and I were friends and they made trouble for him. They went down to Doolittle's grocery and claimed Hoptoad had sold them sugar with salt in it. But they put the salt in themselves and Hoptoad proved it on them. Then they stole a big order he had taken to deliver to a house in the village and Hoptoad might have been blamed for trying to make away with it. Only I happened to see Phil and Hiddie laughing on the road near an old bridge.

After they left I went under the bridge and found the basket of groceries they had sneaked out of Hoptoad's cart and had hid on him. I took it back to the store, so everything came out right.

"But I tell you what, Lanky," says Hoptoad to me that night. "We got to teach those pills a lesson they won't forget."

"I'm with you," I said, "and I know just about what we can do to 'em."

"What?" asks Hoptoad.

"Send 'em on a wild goose chase," I said, and when Hoptoad asked how, I gave him the particulars.

I had noticed that Phil and Hiddie were rather sweet on a couple of high-school girls who lived out toward Burley Park on the far side of town. The girls were pretty enough. I hadn't anything against 'em. But I couldn't understand what they could see in those two pills.

Anyhow, Phil and Hiddie used to buy the girls —May Preston and Sadie Balton their names were—they used to get treated to lots of ice-cream and sodas by the Hooker brothers. And sometimes the two pills would get that blue and white car and take the girls for a ride.

So one night when I had to go out toward Burley Park way to deliver a pair of shoes to a fussy old maid, I said to Hoptoad:

"We'll bring Phil and Hiddie away out there on a wild goose chase and we'll be there to give them the laugh."

"How you going to work it?" my pal asks.

"I'll call Hiddie up on the telephone," I said. "I can imitate a girl's voice pretty good and I'll pretend I'm May Preston. I'll ask Hiddie to get Phil and the auto and come out to give us a ride. The two boys will go all right but the girls won't be there."

"That's a swell trick!" says Hoptoad.

So just before Hoptoad and I took the bus out to Burley Park where I was to deliver the shoes, I called Hiddie up on the telephone.

"Hello, Hiddie! This is May," I said in a sweet, sugary voice. And he come right back with:

"Oh, hello, May! How are you, dear?"

Gee! I nearly liked to bust right out laughing then which would have spoiled the trick, but I held myself in and I jollied that pill for keeps. In the end I made him promise to get his brother and the car and come out to the Park where I said May and Sadie would meet him.

"I'll be there!" says Hiddie all in a flutter.

Well, Hoptoad and I got rid of the shoes and then we hid near the little grove of trees where I'd told Hiddie the girls would be waiting. We didn't have long to wait. Pretty soon up comes the blue and white car and those pills were dressed to kill. Gee! You could smell hair oil and bay rum on 'em clear across the road!

Keeping down in the bushes, Hoptoad and I could see the brothers looking around, up and down the road and getting anxious for it was going to rain and those fellows had taken the top off the car to make it look like a sporty roadster.

"Are you sure May told you she and Sadie would meet us here?" I heard Phil ask Hiddie.

"Sure!" he said. "They must be late."

Well, those fellows hung around for half an hour driving up and down the road and whistling

calls and all that, but of course the girls didn't show up.

Then, all of a sudden, it began to rain. Hoptoad and I didn't care for we had on old clothes and we knew we would be going home soon in the bus which was due in about two minutes. We wouldn't get much wet.

But those two pills in their open car without a top began to get drenched in their good clothes and then the bus came along and Hoptoad and I got aboard and as we rode past the Hooker boys I leaned out of the window and yelled:

"Give my love to May and Sadie!"

Say, they were mad enough to bite nails in two, those fellows were, but I don't know yet if they know we did the trick. Anyhow, Hoptoad and I figured we got even with 'em. But there was more to come—I mean more trouble with that Hooker crowd.

It was the day after this, when I was out on the back yard cutting the grass that I heard a sort of sniffing sound and when I looked I saw a brown dog, hardly more than a puppy, trying to get something to eat out of Matilda's garbage can. That wasn't hard work for a dog, as Mrs. Knouse used lots of food and plenty was left over. But this dog seemed so weak and hungry that he didn't have strength to pick out anything.

"What's the matter, Sport?" I said to him and he wagged his tail at me. He made friends right off and I made up my mind, if Hans would let me and that dog didn't belong to anybody else, I'd

keep him. I called his name Sport 'cause he looked anything but a sporting character just then. "Hungry?" I says and the dog wagged his tail again. "And thirsty, too, I guess," I said. He cocked his head, lifted one ear up and let the other droop down and looked so funny I had to laugh.

So I got him a drink of water and you should see him lap it up! Then he looked at me again just as if he was thanking me, wagged his tail once more and fell to eating stuff out of the garbage pail. It was good stuff for a dog, too, for Matilda was as clean as a needle even about her garbage.

Well, Sport looked twice as good after he'd had a meal. And when I brushed him off a bit and combed out his hair he appeared to be a pretty good dog. I was glad I had him. He seemed to make himself right at home with me and I reckoned he was a lost dog who had just wandered in. And that seemed to be so, for nobody claimed him and I kept that dog a long time. I heard, later, that the dog was a stray mongrel and somebody said they saw the Hooker boys tying a can to his tail. Gee! I wish I'd seen those pills mistreating that dog! I'd have fixed them! So Sport had a good meal for once, anyhow, and when he got through eating out comes Hans.

"Who iss der dog?" he asked me.

"Can I keep him?" I asked when I told how I found him.

"Sure!" says Hans. "A poy und a dog be-

longs mit each udder." So that's how I got Sport and Hoptoad liked him almost as much as I did and Sport liked Hoptoad.

Hoptoad and I were working hard at our new jobs these days. We were doing good, too, I guess, for Ham gave Hoptoad a raise and I was now doing so much for my Dutchman that he said at the end of the month he would pay me more. I began to see quite some daylight ahead of me. I was beginning to be somebody.

But everything wasn't going to run as smooth as it seemed to for a week after we played that girl trick on the Hooker brothers. One day I went down to see Hoptoad at the grocery. I was hungry for herring and crackers, but I wanted to see my pal, anyhow.

There was an old lady getting a basket of groceries right near where I was standing by the counter and I saw some kittens in the corner of the store. I guess they was regular grocery cats that nobody cared much about so when the old lady wasn't looking I put a kitten in her basket.

She had all her groceries in it and the cover was on and I put it back in place after I slipped the kitten in and guessed she wouldn't know about the livestock until she got home.

She looked like a nice old lady, only sort of lonesome and I judged a cat to keep her company would do her good. Anyhow, she got one, though I heard next day from Hoptoad that she came back all in a flutter and raised a row with old man

Doolittle, claiming he might have charged the cat on her bill. But he didn't.

There wasn't much harm done, only Hoptoad said next day that he wished I wouldn't play any more tricks for he might be blamed.

He and I were talking in the store about two afternoons later and I was eating the last of some sweet crackers Mr. Doolittle said I could take while Sport was catching flies that bothered him, when, all of a sudden, Hoptoad looked out of the window and then he dodged back quick and says to me:

"For cats' sake don't let him see me!"

"What's the row?" I said.

But Hoptoad didn't answer. He was making a bee line for the back of the store.

CHAPTER XVII

HOPTOAD'S UNCLE

First along I thought maybe Hoptoad had seen, through the door, somebody he had played a trick on and that they were coming in the store to make trouble, like the time I put the kitten in the old lady's basket. Hoptoad didn't play as many tricks as I did, but when he did play one it was a peach.

But when I looked out I saw only an old man walking along the street in front of the store and I knew from the looks of him and the way he peered around that he was a stranger in Beanville. So I couldn't see why Hoptoad should be afraid.

But my pal was scared and when he got to the back room where there were lots of places to hide in among the barrels and boxes he calls to me:

"Is he coming in, Lanky?"

"Is who coming in?" I asked for I wanted to get at the bottom of this puzzle.

"That man I just saw," was what Hoptoad answered in a whisper. "Don't let him see me!"

"He won't see you if you stay where you are," I said, for we could talk as much as we liked, there being nobody in the store. "And he isn't

coming in," I said, "for he's walking on. Who is he, anyhow?"

"My uncle," says Hoptoad and he sneaked out to take a look for himself.

"Your uncle!" I says, sort of loud and Hoptoad clapped a hand over my mouth and whispered:

"Not so much noise, Lanky! I don't want to go back to him to be beaten up."

"You're not likely to," I said. "He hasn't seen you."

"No, but he must be looking for me or he wouldn't be here in Beanville," says my pal and I admit there was some truth in that. "He must be on my trail and he's been following me," says Hoptoad. "What am I going to do? Sooner or later, if he hangs around Beanville, he's sure to see me or hear about me. You got to help me, Lanky!"

"Of course I will," I said. I may not amount to much but nobody can ever say Lanky Lawson went back on a pal. So I thought for a little while and Hoptoad and I watched the man going down the street and he stopped now and then to talk to folks but everybody he talked to shook their heads as if they were saying they didn't know the answer to his question. And then it came to me.

"Hoptoad," I said, "we have got to throw your uncle off the track."

"Maybe, but how?" he wants to know.

"By giving him a wrong steer," I says. "I've

got to tell a white lie, maybe, but I think it will be all right if he was as mean a man as you say he was, beating you and all that."

"He was worse," says Hoptoad. "Even a black lie wouldn't be any harm to tell him."

"Maybe not," I says, "if it was to get you free of him. And I admit it looks like he was following you or he wouldn't be here away off from where you used to live with him. So I've got to go and kid him."

"You!" says Hoptoad, surprised like.

"Yes, me," I says. "Who else? You can't go out there and tell him you've gone to the far West; can you?"

"Well, I'm not going to, anyhow," says Hoptoad watching while his uncle stopped another man to ask a question. "I don't dare."

"Then I will," I said, "and I'm going to. You lay low, Hoptoad."

So Hoptoad lays low in the back part of the store but maybe he kept watch on what I did out of a corner of a window. Though I don't know for sure. Anyhow, I walked out free and easy like for I knew Hoptoad's uncle didn't know me from this side of a rubber boot. And I got near and asked:

"Have you lost your way, mister?"

"Lost my way? No," he growls out and by the way he talked I could tell he was a mean man. He wasn't even polite to a stranger who might be going to help him for all he knew. Only I wasn't going to help Hoptoad's uncle—not if I knew it.

"This is Beanville, ain't it?" asks Mr. Jake Batter which Hoptoad told me was his uncle's name.

"Yes," I says, "it is."

"Then I'm in the right town," he says, "but I can't find that young rascal. When I do, though, I'll make him wish he'd never run away from me."

"Then you are looking for somebody?" I asks him.

"I am!" he comes back at me. "I'm looking for my nephew, Michael Randall, who ran away from me taking some money that didn't belong to him. I've been on his trail a long time. He's turned into a regular tramp, I hear, and goes from one place to another on freight trains. I traced him as far as Petertown and there I was told some tramps came on trains to either Beanville or Rayville. I've been to Rayville but that young rascal wasn't there. So I came here. Have you seen him?"

I thought, or pretended to think, for a second or two and then I says:

"Was this Michael Randall sort of short and stocky and did he have a scar on one hand?"

"He did!" cries Mr. Batter excitedly. "Where is he?"

"Far from here," I says, sort of solemn like, for by that time Hoptoad might have run out of the store and hopped on a bus to Burley Park, for all I knew. "Yes," I says, "your nephew is far away. I saw him in Petertown. He got on a

freight that was bound for Cleveland or Chicago, I forget which."

"Ha!" cries Hoptoad's uncle. "At last I'm on the trail of him! Young rascal! I'll catch him if I have to go all over the West. So he hopped a freight for Chicago or Cleveland; did he?"

"Yes," I said, "he did and I saw him!"

This was true enough. In Petertown I had seen Hoptoad get on a freight that was bound for Chicago and Cleveland. But it was a mistake getting on that train and Hoptoad soon got off again and came back where I was waiting. But I had seen him jump on that western freight. I didn't have any call to tell that miserly uncle that his nephew had jumped off again. Anyhow, I didn't.

"So he's gone West; has he!" mutters Mr. Batter. "It's just like him! But I'll get him yet. I'll certainly take the very first train for Chicago!"

And off he stumps toward the station while I hurried back to tell Hoptoad the good news. He sure was glad to hear his uncle was going away out West where it would take him a long time to come back from.

"But how can I be sure he has gone?" my pal asks me.

"I'll find out down at the railroad station," I said. And I did later that day. Sport and I ambled down to the railroad and I told the agent how Mr. Batter looked and the agent said he

bought a ticket for Chicago and left on the express that don't hardly more than hesitate at a town like Beanville.

"Well, good riddance to him!" says Hoptoad when it was sure his uncle had left town. "I can now sleep in peace."

"If the mosquitoes don't stop biting me over at Hans's place," I says, "I'll soon be sleeping in pieces."

"Ha! Ha! That's pretty good!" says Hoptoad, laughing. "If we was in a minstrel show that would be a joke."

"It's no joke for me," I says, rubbing some bitten places. But even with mosquitoes and Mrs. Knouse raising a row now and then I was getting fat on her cooking. You should have some of her pie! Oh, boy!

I guess it was about a week after this when I was on my way to school by a back way and as I was kneeling down behind a pile of old boxes to tie my shoe lace that Phil and Hiddie Hooker went past. Beanville is part a country town and sometimes farmers drive cows and other cattle through the streets to market. There was one cow in the street now, tied by a rope to a post, while the farmer was in a store. And I heard Hiddie say:

"Wouldn't it be a joke to drive that cow in school and then blame that shoemaker tramp for it," meaning me.

"I'd like to do it," says Phil, "but I got to make up some back lessons and I'm in a hurry

this morning. You can do it if you like. I'll stand by you."

"I'd rather you'd come with me and help lead the cow," says Hiddie.

"Some other time," says Phil.

Well, when they passed on I got to thinking there was no time like the present time and if they wanted a cow in school it was a pity to disappoint 'em. So, the farmer still being in the store, I untied the cow and led her through a back street to school. I'm not afraid of cows and I know a lot about 'em on account of having milked at the poorhouse. And this cow was friendly. She didn't make any fuss when I opened a side door that led into a hall, give her a clap on her flank, and then I hurried into my own room for I was almost late.

Well, school opened as usual but about half an hour later there was a terrible screaming in the hall outside the room where I was and I heard one of the teachers yell:

"There's a cow in school! Oh, get the janitor! There's a cow in school!"

All at once you would have thought there was a fire in the place the way the row started.

CHAPTER XVIII

I SASS MR. HOOKER

Though I was in one of the low grade classes on account of not having been to school much before that kind Dutchman sent me, yet I am big for my age as you can tell by my nickname Lanky. So when there was a lot of yelling about the cow being in the hall outside our classroom door, I raised my hand and said to my teacher:

"If you please I would like to go out and catch that cow."

"Oh, Harry," she says to me (it had been decided to call me Harry in school instead of Lanky on account of me knowing my initial was H). "Oh, Harry, it may be a wild cow!"

"Wild or tame it makes no difference to me, Teacher," I said. "I know a lot about cows." I could see some of the girls look at me sort of admiring like but I didn't pay any heed to them. And some of the boys looked jealous but I didn't care. "I will go out and catch that cow if you let me," I said.

"Oh, Harry, aren't you afraid?" she asked me and all the while the row was getting worse in the hall and I could hear the cow mooing once or twice.

"I am not afraid," I said. "I think I know this cow," and so I did, but I wasn't saying why.

"If you think you won't get hooked," says my teacher, "it would be brave of you if you could drive the cow, or whatever it is, out of the school."

"It's a cow, I'm pretty sure," I said. "And I guess it won't need much driving. It will be glad to get outside without hooking me."

"Very well, then, Harry," says my teacher, and she let me go out.

There was the cow, sure enough, in the hall where she had wandered after I'd let her into the side door. And looking out of classrooms were a lot of teachers and small boys and girls. The high school part was on the other side of the building where the big boys and girls went. In some ways I wish the cow had wandered into the high school part, but you never know what a cow will do. Anyhow, the cow was in school, which was something. I guess some thought it was too much.

But I walked right up to that cow and I took hold of the rope which I knew was there and I led her out of the school. She hadn't climbed up any stairs, there being none in that part of the building. I don't know whether a cow can climb stairs or not. Some day I am going to find out.

Well, I led the cow outside and, by golly, if that farmer wasn't there waiting for his animal!

"By gum, boy!" he said to me, "I have been looking all over for my cow!"

"Well," I said, "here she is. She's a smart cow—she's been to school!"

The farmer looked at me to make out if I was joking which I wasn't and then he said:

"A man told me he saw a boy leading my cow from in front of the store off toward this school so that's why I come. Did you have anything to do with it?"

I didn't know just what to answer for all of a sudden along came Mr. Helfer, the school principal, and Mr. Smetner, the janitor, and Mr. Helfer asked me:

"Harry, how did this cow ever get in the school?"

"I brought her in," I said for I wasn't going to tell a lie not to save myself.

"You brought this cow in school?" says the principal, quite surprised. "What for, may I ask?"

"The two Hooker boys wanted her," I said, "so I brought her in as they didn't have time. You can ask them."

"Is this a conspiracy?" says Mr. Helfer, stern like.

"No, sir," I said, "I think she is a Jersey cow but I'm not sure. You can ask this farmer, she's his cow. Is she a conspiracy?" I asked.

"She's a pure bred Holstein," says the farmer and I could see Mr. Helfer biting his lips to keep from smiling. But then he looked mad again and told the farmer to take his cow away and then he says to me:

"This must be looked into! If you did such a trick you shall be punished."

"But I only brought the cow in to oblige the Hooker boys," I said. "You can ask them."

"I will!" says Mr. Helfer. "Will you ask Phil and Hiddie to come here?" he says to the janitor. But there was no need, for those two Hooker pills, and a lot of other high-school boys, came along then.

"Phil! Hiddie!" calls the principal. "Did you have anything to do with this cow being found in the hall?"

"Why, no!" says Hiddie, and he looked at his brother.

"Not a thing," says Phil.

"Wait a minute," I said, slow and easy like. "On your way to school this morning didn't you see this cow tied in front of a store and didn't you say you wished you could bring her to class and put the blame on me?" I looked right at Hiddie when I said this.

Well, by golly! You should have seen him turn red and his brother too, and they looked at each other and then at me and then at the principal but they couldn't say it wasn't so for I had 'em dead to rights.

"It was right by Jenkin's hardware store," I says, "that the cow was tied when you saw it."

"That's where I tied her," says the farmer and that sort of clinched my story.

"Yes," I says, "that's where I saw her and I heard Phil and Hiddie talking about it and they

didn't have time to bring the cow along on account of Phil having to hurry to do some studying before school began."

This was all true as they knew and it made me out much better than what maybe I deserved to be made out. But that wasn't my fault.

"Do you mean to say you heard Phil and Hiddie say this, and that you really brought the cow to school?" asks Mr. Helfer.

"Yes," I says, "I brought the cow to school for the Hooker boys, to oblige them. Maybe I did wrong—"

"You certainly did," says the principal. "Is this true?" he asks those two pills.

"Well, part of it is," Phil couldn't help saying. "I did have to do some studying and—"

"I can tell by your manner that Harry is telling the truth," says the principal, "though that doesn't excuse Harry for bringing a cow into school just because you boys wanted to play a trick on him. However, as he has not had your educational advantages," says Mr. Helfer, using a lot of big words, "I shall not punish him. And I cannot punish you for you actually did nothing, though you may have wanted to play this same trick. Luckily, no harm has been done but don't do anything like this again," says the principal to me and I said to him:

"No, sir."

That's all about the cow getting into school.

Except that afterward Phil and Hiddie were madder than ever at me and Hoptoad and they

did a lot of mean things to me. I guess they must have told their father, too, for one day after that he came into the cobbler shop when I was there.

Time and again I had heard a lot about this big bug, Philander Hooker, who was considered the richest man in Beanville. His latest business was selling shares in his Aurora Oil Pipe Line Company which he said would make a millionaire of everybody who invested.

When he first came in Hans's shop I thought maybe Mr. Hooker wanted to get my nice Dutchman to invest, but when I saw Mr. Hooker with a pair of shoes in his hand I knew he was in our line of business. He slammed the shoes down on the counter and says to me:

"Who cobbled these?"

Now it happened that I had, for I was learning the business and could do some repair work pretty well. All the Hooker shoes needed was to be half soled and have rubber heels put on and I had done that when Hans was busy with some other work.

"What's the matter with those shoes?" I asked for I could see nothing wrong.

"They are half soled," snaps out old Hooker. "Who did it?"

"I did it," I said and I wasn't ashamed of my job.

"Well," he says, mad like, "I only ordered rubber heels; that's all I'll pay for!"

He took the shoes up and banged them down

on the counter, almost hitting my fingers which happened to be there.

"Look here, Mr. Hooker," I says, "I took your order and I remember you said to put half soles and rubber heels on those shoes."

"I did not!" he shouts.

"Yes, you did!" and I shouts back just as loud, there being nobody in the place then but me and him. I was going to be just as sassy as he was.

"Don't you talk back to me, you tramp!" he sung out and he raised the heavy cane he carried right over my head. Sport, who was with me behind the counter, raised his head and growled. For a mongrel puppy my dog sure had grit. He was funny looking, though. He sat up with his head cocked to one side, one ear up and the other ear down. That was the way Sport always sat when he was thinking hard about something.

"I'll fix you!" yells Hooker and Sport growled again.

CHAPTER XIX

AN OIL STOCK BOOM

Maybe being a tramp, and sort of on my own, made me braver than what I would have been if I'd never run away from the poorhouse. For when old man Hooker raised that cane over me as if he was going to strike me, I didn't feel afraid at all.

I just stood there looking at him and he glared at me and said once more:

"I only ordered rubber heels and I'm only going to pay for rubber heels."

"You ordered half soles," I said, "but I don't care whether you pay or not. Mr. Knouse will settle that part with you. But I took your order and I know."

"Don't be impertinent, you young whelp!" he yells at me.

With that the cane began to come down.

On the counter near me was a big hook I'd been using to help me haul around some packing cases that had come in full of shoes that day. So when I saw the old codger's game I grabbed up this sharp pointed thing and I sort of aimed it at him and says:

"Go slow, Mr. Hooker, or I'll hook you!"

He jumped back so surprised like that he

dropped his cane to the floor with a bang and says, but in a different voice:

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I said!" I made answer. "If you try any funny business with me I'll hook you and hook you good, Mr. Philander Hooker! I'm not afraid of you if other folks in town are!"

"You—you—" he stuttered at me but he couldn't seem to find the right name to call me so out he walks.

"You're forgetting your shoes!" I says and I threw them after him. "They've got half soles on like you ordered," I says.

He picked the shoes up. Whether he ever paid Hans for 'em I never heard for a lot of things happened right after that and so many of them and so fast that I had other matters to think about than shoes or Mr. Hooker either, though the old codger played a main part in events, as the story books say.

Gee! But I was getting to hate that Hooker bunch and with good reason. Later on other folks hated them, but for a different reason. I'll tell you about it pretty soon.

After that cow in school business and the row I had with the old oil stock promoter things were rather quiet in Beanville for me and Sport and my pal Hoptoad. It was getting on to late fall now, with the weather not so hot, and a lot of folks were buying shoes getting ready for winter. Hoptoad was busy in the grocery too, like I was in the Dutchman's store.

"Go slow, Mr. Hooker, or I'll hook you."

But still, now and again, Hoptoad and I got a little time off 'cause both men we worked for had once been boys themselves and they knew what it was to want to have fun.

Once Hoptoad and I got some things to eat from the grocery and I got some things from Matilda and we decided to take Sport along and pretend we were tramp lads again and make a fire and cook our dinner in the woods by the creek and maybe catch some fish to fry.

Well, that's what we did, only no ugly farmer came along this time to kick the fried fish into the water. Nobody bothered us and Hoptoad and I cooked a good meal with bacon and fish and everything, not to forget some pie Matilda gave me. Only we didn't have to cook that as it was right out of her oven.

We were laying off on the grass in the shade taking it easy after our picnic meal when I heard voices back of the bushes not far off. I looked over and there I saw Mr. Hooker talking to my boss, Hans Knouse.

"Are you sure I vont lose mine moneys like I lost him vunce at der circus?" asked Hans.

"Of course you won't lose it," says Mr. Hooker. "My oil stock business is a sure winner. You will get at least fifty per cent."

"Vot!" cries Hans, "you gif me cents und I gif you dollars? Not so!"

"You don't understand," says Hooker and I could see he was a smooth talker. Why, he had Hans off here in the woods trying to sell him oil

stock I didn't know. But that's what he was doing.

"If you buy Aurora Pipe Line Oil Company stock," says Hooker, "you will get a dollar and a half for every dollar you put in. That's what I meant by fifty per cent."

"Dot sounds goot!" says Hans.

"It is good!" says Hooker. "When will you invest?"

I couldn't hear what my boss says for they moved away just then. But I had heard enough. It wasn't the first time I'd heard talk around town about folks investing in this Hooker oil business. So I says to Hoptoad:

"I don't know much about oil wells, but I'll bet anything Hooker has a hand in is crooked."

"You said it!" chimes in Hoptoad. "There's more suckers in this town than there are in the creek," and he pointed to the water. "I hope your boss doesn't get stuck. Mine is talking about buying some stock, too."

And so it went all over town, as we found out a few days later. There was a meeting in the Town Hall to boom the company and a lot of folks were buying stock in Hooker's oil line. The quotations were going up, but from what I knew of the man I didn't trust him. Hooker had a lot of friends, though. He was president of the riding club in town and he sure looked nifty all togged up in his big boots and with a riding suit on a horse.

Hooker was doing a rushing business in his

stock. Everybody in town seemed to be buying some except me and Hoptoad. We decided we would wait until somebody came along selling stock in a gold mine. If worst came to worst we might go out and dig for gold ourselves. But we didn't know anything about boring for oil.

One day I came back to the shop after I'd been to school and I heard Hans and Matilda having some hot and heavy words.

"You shan't have it!" I heard Matilda say.

"Vy nod?" asked Hans. "It vill make twice as much money for you as vot you haf!"

I began to understand, though I went in the kitchen where they were talking and asked, pretending I didn't know:

"What's it all about?" I was that friendly with them now.

"Hans vants to take some money dot I got from Germany und buy Hooker oil stock," says Matilda. "I say no! He should buy more shoes und sell dem."

"Selling shoes iss such slow work," says Hans. "In oil you make money much quicker."

"Yes, and you lose it quicker," I says. "Keep away from Hooker," I told Hans. "He's a fox and a skunk!"

"He can't be both," says the Dutchman and he meant it.

"Hooker can be more kinds of mean animals at once than anyone in Beanville," I said. "Don't buy his oil stock."

"Dot's vot I say!" chimes in Matilda.

"All right!" says Hans, and he goes back to his cobbling bench.

It was about two mornings after this and I hadn't heard any more about the Knouse family buying oil stock, though the price was going up, when all of a sudden, as I was getting out of bed, I heard a terrible scream from Matilda down in the kitchen.

"Oh! Oh! Oh!" she cries. "It's gone! Ve haf robbed been! Thieves! Police! Murder!"

Sport set up a loud barking and I couldn't imagine what had happened.

CHAPTER XX

THE OLD MILL

"Wait for me!" I yelled getting into my clothes as fast as I could. "Let me have a shot at those robbers and thieves!" I didn't want to miss a chance like this. I thought maybe yelling as I did might scare the burglars away and save something.

But when I hurried downstairs I saw Matilda holding an empty stocking in her hand. It was a big stocking, too, for she had large feet. And the clock door was open as if Matilda had taken the stocking out from its hiding place there which she had done, as I found out later.

"Der burglars haf robbed mine bank!" screams Hans's wife.

"Who took the money?" I asked for I know lots of old-fashioned folks keep their money hid in an old stocking or something like that tucked away in the clock. "And where are the burglars?"

"Dey haf gone!" wails poor Matilda, "und dey have tooken eferyt'ing. All my money what I got from Germany!"

"It's too bad," I said and I began looking around inside and outside the house and shop. But of course it was too late then to find any of

the thieves. They must have come in the night and taken the bundle of bills. I don't know just how much there was but it was a lot to Dutchy and his wife.

"You better tell the police," I said. Not that we have much of a force in Beanville, but it's better than nothing.

"I'll dell 'em!" says Hans, coming downstairs then. "What iss it? Did der burglars take mine shoes?"

"Worse than that. They took your wife's money," I said.

"It iss all gone!" says Matilda, crying some tears.

"Dot's too bad," says Hans, but he seemed glad that none of his shoe stock was gone. "Besser it had been dot I invest der money in Mr. Hooker's oil stock," he says.

"I shall not let you buy oil stock mit mine money!" says Matilda, and of course that was true enough now for the money was gone.

Well, it was a pretty sad time in that house, I can tell you. Of course the Knouse couple had lived before that money came from Germany and they could manage without it. But you know how it is when you lose cash. You're always kicking yourself for what you might have bought with it but didn't because you wanted to save it and then in the end some burglar gets it or you drop your pocketbook.

"Yah, it iss too bad!" says Hans. "Maybe it vos some tramps dot took your money, Matilda.

I tole you not to talk so much about it to der neighbors."

"I didn't talk so much more as you," says Matilda. "Und if it was tramps took my bills maybe der police can find 'em. Anyhow you can telephone."

So Hans did and while I was eating my breakfast and putting the shop in order I got to thinking.

"By golly! I'm a tramp, or I was. And so was Hoptoad. If the police think tramps took Matilda's cash they may think we boys had something to do with it, having been tramps up to a short time ago, or maybe they'll think I passed the word to a bunch of tramps where they could find the cash."

But I didn't say anything. Only I figured that if they were going to accuse me of stealing it, which I didn't do, I'd light out again and wander, though I sure did like Matilda's cooking.

Well, the head constable came and looked around the place, but he said he couldn't find any place where burglars or tramps had broken in, and I couldn't either. And nobody seemed to think that Hoptoad or I had had any hand in the business so I let things ride as they were and went to work in the store.

Of course there was a great how-de-do in Beanville when it got noised around that Matilda's money was stolen. But there was so much other excitement in town over the boom in Hooker's oil stock that most folks talked about that. Even

Hans was more excited than I'd ever seen him before, and instead of attending to his cobbling he sat at his bench and said, over and over again:

"Py golly! Maybe I get rich!"

"How?" I asked him.

"Py oil stock," he comes back at me.

"I thought you didn't have any money to invest unless your wife let you take hers and that's stolen," I says.

"Vell, maybe I finds dot money und den Matilda vill let me take it for oil stock," says my cobbler friend. "Pretty soon I go out in der country und look for tramps."

I thought to myself that he'd have a swell chance of getting on the trail of any tramps that might have the cash. Of course I knew it was possible for a tramp to have sneaked in the Knouse kitchen some time during the day and to have taken the money out of the clock. Matilda didn't miss it until morning, but the robbery might have taken place the day before. She admitted she hadn't opened the clock to see if her cash was safe for a couple of days. Almost anything might have happened.

Hans went off that afternoon. He said he was going to look for tramps to see if he could get back his wife's money. I didn't offer to go with him, for I didn't have much hope he'd find out anything. Besides Hoptoad and I had a couple of hours off that afternoon and we decided to go fishing. Sport went along, of course. Every now

and then he'd stop to look at something, one ear up, one ear down.

"What say we try down by the old mill," says Hoptoad after we started with our poles and bait. "There's a deep eddy there and it ought to have some big fish."

"Sure," I said. So we went.

The old mill was one where they used to grind grain before they got five and ten cent stores where you can buy a small bag of flour all ready mixed to put into the oven, it seems. And the old mill was pretty much in ruins. The wheel had rotted away and the flume had fallen apart but there was a deep place where Hoptoad and I always thought there would be big fish.

We had pretty good luck, pulling out some beauties and when we figured we had enough Hoptoad says:

"What say we look through the old mill?"

"I'm ready," I told him, so we put our fish in a safe place and went inside. It was a rambling old shack and in some places it was dangerous to walk for the floor was rotted away. But Hoptoad and I watched out and we went all over the place.

After a while we got to a sort of storeroom I guess it was, with only one door and no windows. This place wasn't as rotten as most of the rest of the mill.

"Let's have a look in here," says Hoptoad. So we went inside. My dog tagged in after us, of course. He was as curious as a girl.

It was dark after you got to the far end but there didn't seem to be anything much there except some bats that flew around our heads making Sport bark, and I didn't much care for them. Hoptoad and I were together at the far corner and we couldn't find anything except a lot of old musty flour and grain bags when, all of a sudden, the place got very dark back behind us where we had left the door open.

"The wind must be blowing it shut," says Hoptoad.

"I hope it hasn't got a spring lock on so we get trapped in here," I said.

And by golly! I hadn't no more than got those words out of my mouth before that door slammed shut with a bang. But it wasn't the wind that shut it. It was Phil and Hiddie Hooker, for we heard them laugh as they ran away and Phil shouted:

"See how you like it in there!"

And his brother said:

"Maybe a cow will come and let you out!"

And there we were, prisoners in the old mill!

CHAPTER XXI

HOW WE GOT OUT

"WELL, what do you know about this?" says Hoptoad after he had felt his way across the dark room and had tried the door.

"I don't know much about it," I said, "and, what's more, I don't care very much, either. Being shut up in this old mill isn't what I call a good time, especially when those Hooker pills did it."

"I guess it was Phil and Hiddie that did it all right," says Hoptoad, trying to open the door.

"I'm positive sure of it," I said. "They must have been around here fishing and they saw us come in and watched their chance to play a trick on us."

"Most likely," my pal says. And then he yelled: "Hey, you—Phil! Hiddie! Let us out of here if you know what's good for you!"

We could hear those fellows laugh which showed they weren't far away and then I heard Phil say:

"You'll be older than you are now before you get out!"

I was getting mad now and so was Hoptoad, but that didn't do us much good. The thing to do was to find out how to open that door and I

could tell that it wasn't going to be easy. Either it shut with a spring lock or whatever kind of a lock was on it had rusted so that no matter how much we turned the knob on our side it didn't do any good.

"What are we going to do?" says Hoptoad after we'd tried hard to kick the door down.

"We've got to study over this a bit," I says. "If we had some sort of a light—"

"By golly! Why didn't I think of it before!" sings out Hoptoad and I could hear him fumbling in his pockets and pretty soon the old mill room was bright. Hoptoad had a little electric torch and it sure looked good. Even Sport was getting leery of that darkness.

"Now we can see what we're doing," I said.

So we looked at the door. There wasn't much to be seen on our side, but the door was wood and I had a knife with a big blade in my pocket so I figured I might be able to cut a hole through the door big enough to slip my hand outside and turn the catch. I told Hoptoad about this and we began taking turns at whittling away just like I've read of prisoners in a cell cutting their way to freedom as the books say. I wanted my freedom and so did Hoptoad. I guess Sport did, too. But most of all we wanted to get square with those Hooker pills.

It was hard work cutting a hole through that door and it must have taken us over an hour. I was wondering what Hans would say on account of me not coming home before supper, like I said

I would, with some fish for his wife to fry. And Hoptoad said his boss might be mad for him staying away so long.

But what could we do?

So we kept on whittling. I held the light while Hoptoad used the knife and he held it for me. We had a pretty good hole in the door now and I knew I could soon get my hand through which, on account of me being called Lanky, I had a thinner hand than Hoptoad and it didn't need such a big hole.

We hadn't made much noise and the whittling was quiet work but even though we stopped to listen now and then we heard no more of the Hooker boys.

"I guess they've gone home," says Hoptoad.

"And laughing at the way we walked into their trap," I says. "But we'll soon be out."

"And then we'll have our turn," Hoptoad says.

I kept on cutting away and pretty soon I had the hole big enough so I could stick my hand out. I felt around until I got hold of a knob and, sure enough, it was a spring catch and I could easily push it back and the door opened.

"Gosh! I'm glad to get out!" said Hoptoad.

"So am I," I comes back at him with. And we were surprised to see that it was getting dark, for it was fall and the days were short.

Still it was light enough to see things outside, and partly in the old mill which hadn't any doors or windows on. As I stepped out of the door of the room where we had been locked in I stumbled

over something. It was a pile of bags but in among them I saw a small bundle. I stooped over, picked it up and put it in my pocket. I was just going to tell Hoptoad about it when all of a sudden he caught hold of my left arm and whispers:

"There they are!"

"Who?" I asked and I whispered, too.

"Those Hooker brothers," said Hoptoad in answer and there was light enough for me to see the two pills ahead of us and walking along the edge of what had been the mill flume. There they were—the two boys who had shoved the door shut on us.

"They must have been hanging around to see what we would do," said Hoptoad.

"Maybe," said I, "they were going to let us out after it got dark, if we hadn't let ourselves out."

We didn't stop to ask the right of this for just then those pills saw us coming and they began to run. Hoptoad and I ran at the same time and I yelled:

"We'll fix you!"

"Come on!" yelled Hiddie and he starts ahead of his brother to run along a plank that was like a bridge across the flume. Though most of the flume was rotted away part of it was left and it was filled with water over my head. It was green and slimy water, too, and it didn't smell very good.

Phil saw his brother's game, which was to

cross the flume by that plank bridge before we got to it, and then they could knock it down and we would be left. We couldn't jump the flume, it was too wide and by the time we got around it Phil and Hiddie would be far away. But all of a sudden I knew what to do.

On the ground was a long pole maybe for rescuing people that fell in the flume. I grabbed it up and ran ahead. And when Phil and Hiddie were right on the middle of that plank I reached out with the pole and shoved the end of the plank nearest me. It wasn't nailed fast so it came loose and went into the water and with it went those Hooker pills—ker-splash just like when Hoptoad fell in.

"Wow!" cries my pal. And I could hear Hiddie yell as he went down: "Help! Help!" And gee! How Sport barked!

"If you want any help why don't you advertise in the papers?" I calls out. "They have help wanted columns."

But Phil and Hiddie didn't have any time to answer me on account of their heads, by this time, being under that green, scummy water. Hoptoad and I stood on the edge of the flume looking down at those brothers who were floundering around in the water.

We knew they could both swim, and good, too, for we'd seen 'em do it. So we knew they wouldn't drown. And there wasn't much current in the flume now and no danger of being drawn into the wheel for that was rotted away. So we

left those pills to swim out as best they could with all their clothes on.

We waited until they had got to the low part of the flume, where they could crawl out, and say! I wish you could have seen 'em! They looked like drowned rats with a lot of green scum all over 'em. And as Hiddie climbed out he looked toward us in the darkness and he says:

"Wait until I get hold of you, tramp cobbler!"

"Want a chance at a tramp groceryman?" asked Hoptoad, snickering.

Hiddie was going to say more but his brother shut him up. I guess those Hookers got more than they counted on in tricks that day. Aside from having some hard work whittling and being late in getting back, Hoptoad and I weren't much bothered.

But you should have seen those fellows!

They didn't have another word to say. They climbed out on the bank, with water running off them all over and with their shoes going plop-plop as they started to walk away.

"Ha! Ha!" says Hoptoad.

"Ha! Ha!" I says. "What about a cow now?"

But they didn't answer. Hoptoad and I grinned and you may not believe it, but there was a smile on my dog's face. Sport was smart.

Hoptoad and I were so tickled over the way things had turned out that we didn't talk much about anything else. We went and got our fish and we weren't much worried about getting back

late, for I knew Matilda would be thinking about her lost money and Hans never said much anyhow. The only thing I was really anxious about was would I get something to eat so late, and Hoptoad said the same thing.

"But if worst comes to worst," he says, "I can sneak in the back window of the grocery and get some things and I can leave the money to pay for them on the counter."

But we didn't have to do that. When we got back to town we found both my folks and Hoptoad's were out. There was a big meeting in town that night to boom the oil stock game and everybody who could go had gone, including Hans and Matilda and Ham Doolittle. I guess Matilda didn't figure on buying any stock though maybe Hans did.

Hoptoad told me later he found his supper set out for him on the kitchen table and there was also a good feed for me where Matilda had left it. So I cleaned the fish and put them in the ice box and then I ate and then, all of a sudden, I remembered the package I had picked up from among the old flour bags in the mill room where we had been locked.

I put my hand in my pocket, pulled out the bundle and when I opened it I got the biggest surprise I ever had in my life.

CHAPTER XXII

MY STRANGE DISCOVERY

Scattered over the kitchen table where I was eating were a lot of green bills—money—bank notes. Cash! More than I had ever seen at once in all my life before. It fairly made me tremble and I looked over quick to see that the window shades were down for I didn't want any tramps looking in to see all that wealth.

"By golly!" I whispers to myself. "Where did it come from?"

Of course I knew I had picked up the bundle of money in the old mill, from among the flour and feed bags. But what I meant was where did it come from to get in the mill?

I tried to count the money but I got all mixed up. I never was any good at arithmetic, but I made out there was five or six hundred dollars there and maybe more, for I found some bills were sticking together and I counted two as one first along.

And when I came to look and find out what made the bills stick I got another surprise.

"By gosh it's cobbler's wax!" I said, and it was.

Then I looked at the bundle which was paper that had been folded around the bills and by

golly that paper had been tied with waxed ends, which are what old fashioned cobblers use to put soles on shoes. In most places they have machinery now for soling shoes and the machine stitches through leather like your mother might sew through cloth. But Hans used the old-fashioned hand style and when I saw that waxed end and the little gobs of wax between some of the ten dollar bills, I says:

"This is the money that was stolen from Matilda! It sure is!"

Then I got to thinking how queer it was for the burglars or tramps, or whoever it was that took Matilda's money, to hide it in the mill among the flour bags.

"And it's funnier still," I says to myself, "that they would stop, after taking the money out of the clock, to tie it up with waxed ends."

Then all of a sudden, like a flash of light from one of those pocket torches like Hoptoad's, it came to me.

"By golly! Hans took this money himself and hid it in the old mill and he let his wife think it was some tramps or burglars that did it. By golly!"

I was all in a tremble now, by what I had found out or what I thought I knew and I looked everything over again. There was no mistake—the waxed ends were there and the gobs of wax, and Hans was an old-fashioned cobbler.

"But why would he take Matilda's money?" I asked myself, for I was alone in the kitchen at

the time except for the stove and the dishes and such like.

And right away the answer came to me just like I was in school and the teacher was asking how much is seven times six.

"Hans took this money," I says to myself, "and he let his wife think it was a regular robbery, 'cause he wants to use the money later on to buy some stock in Hooker's oil pipe line company!"

I was sure this was right. I knew how crazy anxious Hans was not only to invest his own money in the shares but his wife's as well. The only trouble was Hans didn't have much money of his own. His wife was the cashier of that family and she made him hand over what he took in at the store and gave him back enough for his tobacco and things like that.

Matilda sure was a boss and I'm not saying it wasn't right for her to be, for Hans was careless with his money or he wouldn't have been robbed by the circus thimble riggers.

I could see it all now, almost as if I had watched it. Hans knew his wife kept the money she got from Germany in the clock and she thought it was so safe there that for days at a time she'd never go near it. He watched his chance and took the money out of the clock. He didn't want to keep it around him or leave it in the house or shop so he wrapped it in paper, and in doing that he got gobs of wax off his hands between some of the bills. Then he tied the bundle with a waxed

end and dropped it in what he thought was the safest place in the old mill.

"Nobody hardly ever goes to that mill," I says to myself. "It was just by chance that Hoptoad and I went fishing there and another chance that we went inside. Why the Hooker boys went there I don't know."

Anyhow, that's how it happened. Hans figured on coming back later, getting the money and investing it in Hooker oil stock. He would get as big a surprise as I got when he went back to get the cash.

Anyhow, it was safe with me and I made up my mind that it would be a long while before any of those bills went into the pockets of that Hooker skin. I was sure he was a skin, though lots of folks thought he was what they called a financial wizard. He was a wizard all right but he got the best of the financial end. He didn't care how he got it, either.

I didn't know what time Matilda and Hans would be back from the stock selling meeting. Most of the people in town were crazy over what Hooker called "the chance of a life time!" He ought to be sent to jail for life. So with Hans and his wife out, I thought the best thing I could do would be to go to bed and take the money with me. In the morning I could decide what to do with it.

So I ate two more pieces of the pie Matilda had kindly left out for me on account of knowing it isn't healthy for a growing boy like me to wake

up hungry in the night. Then I turned in and so did my dog Sport.

It was quite late when I was woke up by hearing loud talk downstairs and I made out that Hans and Matilda was having one of their little regular rows. She was rating him for wanting to buy oil stock and he was telling her that if she had taken his advice and invested her savings from the clock they wouldn't have been taken by the burglar.

And I was surprised when Matilda said:

"Vell, maybe you vos right, Hans. Der oil stock might be some goot but der money vot vos in der clock iss now no goot by me."

I could see the game Hans was trying to work then. He figured on getting his wife's money out of the mill where he hid it, buying stock with it and then telling her what he had done. He was working her around to his way of thinking.

However, I thought of a little trick I could play that would make everything come out right. I'll tell you about it pretty soon.

I didn't let on to Hans and Matilda when they come in from the oil stock meeting but what I was asleep in bed. They could tell by what was eaten that I had been in and when Matilda opened the ice box and saw the fish all cleaned ready to fry next day she said:

"Lanky iss a goot poy! He comes back mit fish."

"Yah!" says Hans. "He must of had to wait a long time for a bite, for it was late when we started out und he vasn't home den."

I didn't let on I heard, but I tucked that roll of bills under my pillow and I couldn't help grinning in the dark as I thought of the surprises I had in store for Hans and Matilda.

I was down in the shop early next morning when who should walk in but Philander Hooker. He carried a pair of fancy riding boots, for, as I told you, he was president of the Beanville Riding Club. And before I could say a word he plops out:

"Look here, boy, I want to see you!"

"Wow!" I thought to myself. "Here's trouble!"

CHAPTER XXIII

A QUEER LETTER BOX

First thing I did was to get behind the counter so in case old man Hooker made any more passes at me with his cane I would be ready for him. But he didn't raise his stick. Then I thinks that he's going to tell me he's going to have me arrested for what Hoptoad and I did to his two sons—dumping them in the mill flume. But I had another surprise coming to me when Hooker says:

"Now look here, boy! I don't want any more disputes about things I bring here to mend. I don't want any half sole on these riding boots. They're both ripped and I want them sewed up. That's all, and I'm not going to pay Knouse or you a big sum to have 'em mended."

He threw the riding boots on the counter so hard they almost slid off and hit me. If they had I was mad enough to sling them back at him. But seeing as how they didn't plump into me I took it easy and said:

"All right, Mr. Hooker. We'll mend your boots." I wasn't any too friendly but you see you got to be polite to customers whether you hate 'em or not.

"And have 'em ready for me by to-morrow," he says.

"All right," I made answer.

Hooker was going out after scowling at me when Hans came into the shop. He was all smiles, was my boss, for I reckon he couldn't get over thinking Hooker was the richest man in town and maybe could make others rich by that oil stock.

"Goot morning, Mr. Hooker," says Hans.

"Oh—morning!" Hooker growls like he hadn't time to waste in being polite. "You haven't bought that oil stock yet that you said you were going to, Knouse," snaps out Hooker.

"Shush! Not so lout!" whispers Hans with his finger on his lips and looking back toward the kitchen as if he was afraid his wife would hear. "Maybe so I be at your office to-day, Mr. Hooker."

"All right," said the old skin, and out he goes.

I figured then, that Hans planned to go to the old mill, get the money from where he had hidden it, and buy oil stock with it. And I had hard work to keep from laughing when I thought of the look on his face when he saw the money was gone. He'd be sure to see the cut door and then he'd know somebody had been there and, likely, stolen the money.

"But Matilda's money isn't going into fake oil stock," I says to myself as I thought of the bills hidden up in my room.

Hooker went out and I couldn't help thinking what a mean skunk he was, after the money of

this German. Hans wasn't rich by a long shot. He needed all the cash he and his wife had. And Hooker was one who would squeeze a buffalo nickel so hard that you could almost hear it bellow. He was the kind of a man that would drop a dime on the plate at a church missionary meeting and then ask for five cents change.

"Dot Mr. Hooker iss one fine man!" says Hans to me.

"Maybe so," I said, for I was thinking of other things.

"He brings in his boots vot for?" asked Hans.

"Just to have these rips sewed up," I told him. "I'll do it a little later," for I knew Hans had a lot of work on hand.

"All right," says my cobbler. "But do for him a good job."

I didn't know it then, but a little later I sure did for Mr. Hooker a good job. You'll hear about it pretty soon.

I had two or three errands down the street and I went to do them, meaning to sew Hooker's boots when I got back. On my way I passed the shop of Jake Levy the only other shoe dealer in town. And by golly what do you think that fellow had done?

Hans Knouse had the agency for a certain line of cheap shoes that sold like hot cakes to Italians who had to work in the dirt. Hans was supposed to have the exclusive agency for these shoes but when I looked in Levy's window that son of a pistol had a lot of those same shoes and marked

half a dollar less than Hans could afford to sell them for.

"The dirty skunk!" I says. I don't know how Levy managed it but he had cut under my boss in some way and I wasn't going to stand it. "I'll fix him," I says and I did.

Outside his shop Levy had a lot of boxes of odd lots of shoes marked for a dollar and a half a pair. They were bargain shoes and I knew he couldn't be making much profit on them. I knew if they were sold for a dollar he would be losing money.

There was nobody near the front of the shop then. So I went in a paper store down the street, got a bottle of mucilage and some pieces of blank paper and stuck them over the fifty cent mark, making the shoes for sale at a dollar a pair. Then I waited, hiding in a doorway near by. Sport curled into a ball near me so the flies couldn't get at him much and every now and then he'd watch me, one ear up and the other ear down like he was trying to ask what game I was playing.

Pretty soon along come a couple of Italians and as soon as they saw those shoes for a dollar a pair they each grabbed up two pairs, one for themselves, I guess, and maybe one for their wives, and they handed two dollars each to Levy's son who came out to attend to the sidewalk customers and away those sons of Italy scooted with their bargains. And they really was bargains, believe me. I knew something about shoes by this time.

Levy's son didn't know his old man was being stuck, selling shoes for less than they cost him, so he grinned at making the sale. And while he stood there some more people came along and he was kept busy for a while selling dollar and a half shoes for a dollar a pair.

And then I got what I was waiting for. Old Levy himself comes out to see what was making all the sidewalk business for him, and when he saw the sign of shoes for a dollar he gave some yells.

"Yoi! Yoi! Yoi! Ruined I am! At a dollar and a half I makes maybe ten cents. But now I lose a lot. Oh, Ikie! Such a business!"

"But, Paw, the shoes are marked a dollar," says young Levy, and so they were. Then the two looked at the sign and when the old man saw where paper had been pasted over the fifty cents he let out another yell.

"Yoi! Yoi! Yoi! Some one plays tricks on me!"

"Yes," I says, coming out from around the corner where I had been hiding. "I did it and if you don't stop cutting the price on those Italian brogans I'll play some more!"

"You—you—" he starts to say to me but he couldn't think of anything he was so sick over losing money. So I went on but when I came back I noticed that Levy had those brogans marked at the same price Hans charged, which didn't give Levy any advantage over my boss.

I wanted to go fishing with Hoptoad again that

afternoon and talk about the money I had found in the old mill and ask him what he'd do about it—I mean to let Hans and his wife know it was safe. I didn't always take Hoptoad's advice, but sometimes two heads are better than one even if the second one is sort of wooden. And I guess you know whose head I mean.

So to get Hans in good feeling, so he'd let me go fishing, I went to work around the shop, slicking it up and then I planned to sew Hooker's boots. All this while I could see that Hans was sort of uneasy. He was hurrying his work, too, like he wanted to get some time off and I figured he aimed to go out to the mill to get the money that wasn't there. But I didn't say anything.

"Mr. Knouse," I said, just before I started to sew Hooker's boots, "can I go fishing this afternoon?"

"Sure, Lanky," he says quick like. "I go off myself soon as I finish one more pair. But I don't go vishing. Ve got enough vish vot you brought in last night. There vill not be much trade dis afternoon, so I leaf Matilda in der shop. Ve both go off."

Well, that suited me. Hans got through his work in a hurry and went out telling me to go when I got ready and Matilda she got her knitting and was going to sit in the store to wait on any customers that might come. Matilda knew how to sell shoes, too.

And now comes the queer part. I started to work on Hooker's left boot but when I put my

hand down inside to press out the leather and see how far it was ripped I felt something stuffed down in the toe. It was a bundle of some kind. First I thought it might be more money but when I pulled it out I saw it was a lot of letters.

"That's queer!" I says, "using a boot for a post-office box."

But even I didn't know how very queer it was. I soon found out, though.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE FAKE EXPOSED

While I had been working for Hans Knouse I had also been going to school, like I told you, and by this time I could read better than I ever had before and I knew more about arithmetic than to multiply six by seven.

So when I pulled that bundle of letters out of Hooker's boot, and some of them were already out of the envelopes, it didn't take me long to read them. Some I couldn't help reading. And after I read those, I knew I ought to read all the rest to show the people of Beanville what a big fake Hooker was and how he planned to cheat as many as he could, my boss among them.

"Gee whillikers!" I says as soon as I had gone over that bundle of letters and other papers. "I sure am some postman this afternoon and this is the queerest letter box ever I did see!"

I didn't say anything to Matilda about what I'd found. I wanted to get away and show Hoptoad and talk it over with him. So as soon as I had sewed Hooker's boots, which didn't take long, I lit out. I had my time off and I took my pole like I was going fishing but I didn't intend to wet a hook until Hoptoad and I had settled this queer business. I didn't know if Hoptoad could get any

time off, but anyhow I could talk to him in the back part of the store and maybe eat crackers and cheese while doing it.

But it happened that Hoptoad had to take Ham Doolittle's crazy old horse and rig to go to the freight depot to get some groceries that had come in on the last freight so we rode off together. Everything was working my way.

We drove off to a quiet spot, Hoptoad looking at me sort of queer when I told him I had a big secret under my hat, and then I let him have the whole story from the part about finding the money Hans had hid up to where I found the letters in Hooker's boot.

"But what are the letters about?" Hoptoad wanted to know.

"They're about a fake and a swindle and a fox and a skunk," I says and my pal laughs and says:

"They must be some letters."

"They are," I said and I showed him some and he thought the same as I did, and I asked: "What would you do?"

"The best thing to do," says Hoptoad, "is to take these to Lawyer Gibson. He does work for Ham Doolittle and I've often taken letters and papers to his office for my boss. That lawyer is a square shooter and he knows me. Let's go see him."

"What about your load of groceries?" I asked.

"They can stand in the street in front of Lawyer Gibson's office," my pal says. "It won't be

the first time I've stopped Ham's rig there to take up papers to be signed."

It didn't take Lawyer Gibson long to go over the letters I had found. I didn't tell him about finding Matilda's money. I wanted to work that part of the game myself. Besides I didn't want that lawyer to know what a mean trick Hans played on his wife.

"The wretched scoundrel!" busts out Mr. Gibson after he went through the letters and other papers a second time.

"Who?" I asks.

"Philander Hooker," says the lawyer. "The whole thing is a fake!"

"What is?" I wanted to know.

"That Aurora Pipe Line Company of his," he says. "It's a stock swindle from start to finish and there is going to be a hot time in town when it gets to be known. Those who didn't buy any of his fake stock are the lucky ones."

"Then Hoptoad and I are lucky," I says, "for we didn't buy any of Hooker's stock."

Lawyer Gibson laughed a little. I guess he knew, without me telling him, that my pal and I didn't have any money for stock. But then he frowned again and said:

"I'm glad you brought me these papers, Lanky. One of my clients has invested some money in this fake stock, against my advice, and I have the right to act for him. I'll go before the judge at once and pretty soon Mr. Hooker will wish he hadn't tried to bamboozle the people of Bean-

ville." Maybe those aren't the exact words Lawyer Gibson used but that's what he meant.

So Hoptoad and I left the papers with him and went back to the grocery wagon. I rode with Hoptoad to his store 'cause there was a new shipment of cheese and herring on that load and I thought maybe Ham Doolittle might want me to sample them for him to see if they were the right brand to hand out to his customers.

And Mr. Doolittle did. At least he did after Hoptoad spoke about the matter and the kind grocer says:

"Sure, help yourselves, boys."

So we did, giving Sport a mouthful now and again, and it was while I was eating that I thought of the best way to get Matilda's money back to her without showing Hans up, which I didn't want to do. If she raised a row about him losing a little to the circus thimble riggers she sure would scalp him if she found out he took her money to invest in oil stock, only he hadn't done it 'cause I beat him to it.

"Well," says Hoptoad when I was leaving and had told him what I was going to do, "in a short time we will be heroes, Lanky."

"Heroes?" I asks him.

"Sure," he says. "It will become known that you, with my little help, exposed the fake Hooker and people will thank us for saving their money for them."

"Maybe," I said and that's just how it turned out, as you'll see pretty soon.

I went back to the shop and just as I got there in came Hans with a look on his face that let me know as plain as if he had spoken that he had been to the old mill and didn't find the money. He sure looked to be all in or all out, whichever way you like.

But before he had a chance to speak, in comes rushing Philander Hooker. His face had a queer look, too, something like Hans's only different.

"My boots!" says Hooker short like.

"All ready for you," I says, cheerful, handing them to him over the counter. "Not soled or half soled," I said, "but sewed, like you asked, and the charge is only fifty cents and you can pay Mr. Knouse," I said fast like.

Hooker didn't even look at the sewing I had done which was a good job if I do say it myself. He just rammed one hand down that left boot leg and then the look on his face was more queer than ever. He went sort of white.

"Those papers!" he snaps out like he was barking at me. "I left some papers in one of my boots by mistake. They dropped in and I forgot to take them out. Where are those papers?"

"You are too late, Mr. Hooker," I said. "Lawyer Gibson has those papers and letters you left in your boot."

"Lawyer Gibson!" he yells.

"Yes, Lawyer Gibson," I said again and I took care to keep behind the counter for Hooker had his cane. But he didn't even raise it. He just

staggered out of the store without even taking his boots or paying that fifty cents.

"Vot iss all dis?" asked Hans, for he could see something was wrong.

"It means," I said, "that pretty soon a fake is going to be shown up."

"A fake?"

"Sure! Philander Hooker and his oil stock. It's a busted swindle," I says, "and you can be glad you didn't invest your wife's money from Germany in the Aurora company, Mr. Knouse," I says.

"Mine Himmel!" he yells out, pulling at his hair. "I might yost as vell haff buyed oil stock because Matilda's money iss all gone, anyhow!"

I smiled then, for I had a card in my shoe, so to speak, that I hadn't played yet.

And just then I heard newsboys yelling out in the street.

"Extra! Extra! Full account of the Hooker swindle. Big fake exposed! Aurora Pipe Line Oil Company bankrupt! Big fake! Extra! Extra!"

CHAPTER XXV

I MOVE ON

Lawyer Gibson had sure got busy in a hurry. Soon after I left those letters and papers with him that I found in Hooker's boot, Mr. Gibson went to court and what they did there I don't know 'cause I'm not up on law. But anyhow it was something like arresting Hooker or suing him. And of course reporters were there, as they're all over, anyhow, and they got hold of the story and it came out in the paper and it was all up with Hooker's Aurora Pipe Line Oil Company.

You should have been in Beanville then to see the excitement! The time Widow Haskell's house burned up was nothing to it. A lot of folks were running around crazy to sell their stock before it was too late. But it was too late now.

"The bottom has dropped out of the market," I heard one man say and he was smiling. I guess he sold out before my explosion came.

There was so much excitement that Hans didn't seem to care whether I worked or not so I took some more time off and went to see Hoptoad. He had bought a paper, which I didn't have time to do, and we read it together around the corner in a quiet place. Hoptoad had brought some crack-

ers and cheese from the store so we had a little lunch while we read just like I've seen big bankers read a paper with their meal in swell restaurants.

"Well, Lanky," says Hoptoad as he pointed to something in the paper, "we are heroes. At least you are."

"How come?" I asked him.

"It tells here," says my pal, "how you found the incriminating documents in Hooker's bootleg."

"All I found was some letters and papers," I made answer.

"It appears those are incriminating documents," says Hoptoad, and there it was in plain print in the paper just like he said. Course they didn't have my right name, Lanky. They had it Harry Lawson, which I'm not sure is my name. It might be Henery. But that didn't matter. It was all there how I found the things and how Hooker came to claim 'em too late.

"Mr. Hooker cannot be found," the paper said, "to give his account of the affair but it is said, on good authority, that the company is bankrupt and will not pay more than ten cents to the dollar if it does that."

"Well," says Hoptoad, "I wish I knew where I could get a dollar for ten cents."

"I don't think it means that," I said and later I found it didn't. But I was interested in one thing. It said Hooker could not be found.

"Maybe he has skipped," said Hoptoad.

"I guess so," I answered.

And he had. Philander Hooker was not seen in Beanville again for a long time, nor his two pills of sons, either. The house was taken in charge by the sheriff but that fine blue and white car wasn't to be found. I guess Hooker skipped out in that.

By this time almost everybody in Beanville was out on the street talking about the fake and swindle. It soon got noised around that Hoptoad and I had something to do with the affair and lots of men and boys pointed at us as we walked along the street.

"We're heroes," says Hoptoad.

"Maybe," said I again.

But wait and see how it turned out.

Hoptoad and I wandered around town a good bit, for it was the first time either of us had been heroes, like my pal called us, and it was sort of fun. It got to be evening. More folks were out in the street. Everybody was talking about the Hooker fake. Lots of people had been hit hard.

What he did, as I found out later, was to form a company and sell what is called "stock." I always thought stock was cattle and horses and cows on a farm. But it appears there's two kinds of stock. Hooker didn't have any oil well or pipe line or anything else. All he had was a slick tongue and a lot of pieces of paper called "stock" that he sold. Now some folks got wise to him before I found the letters that showed the whole thing was a swindle. And those folks sold their stock at a good price. Those folks were the ones

that called Hoptoad, and me especially, a hero.

But there was more people that had held on to their stock until the bottom dropped out of the market, like that man said. Those people had lost all their money and they didn't call us heroes.

"Why didn't you keep still about this thing being a fake until I could have sold out my stock?" one man asked me and he was mad.

"What for?" I wanted to know.

"Then I could have sold out and made some money," he says.

"Somebody who bought your fake stock would have lost," I said.

"What would I care for that?" he asked me, but I didn't answer.

And then, all of a sudden, it seems, people sort of turned against me, for it was known I spilled the duck soup so to speak. These folks began to say mean things about me as Hoptoad and I walked around Beanville.

"Why couldn't you have kept still another day or so till I sold out?" more than one asked me and I begun to see I wasn't as popular as I had been.

"We ought to run those two tramps out of town," said another man who must have been hard hit.

I heard this and I said to Hoptoad:

"I don't like this town as much as I did. I think I'll move on and get out. Sport and I will try some new diggings."

"Where'll you go?" asked Hoptoad.

"I haven't made up my mind yet," I said.

"But I'm going to move on," and I started for the Knouse place to pack up. I didn't know how Hans would take my leaving but I couldn't help it. Also I had one thing I wanted to do before I left.

"Well," says Hoptoad, "I sure hate to see you go, but since you upset Hooker's apple cart this town isn't going to be so nice for you, I can see that. And maybe I'll go with you."

"I wish you would," I said.

Then I left him and Sport and I went to the German's and there was Hans and Matilda sitting in the kitchen both looking sad, but Hans was worse for he knew he was to blame (or he thought he was) for losing his wife's money.

"Well," I said, before spilling the news about me going to move on, "Hooker is done for and so is his oil game."

"It iss too bat!" says Matilda. "I am glad I dit not let Hans buy oil stock, but I wish I hat mine moneys vot was stole."

"Are you sure it was stole?" I said. "Where did you keep it, Mrs. Knouse?" Just as if I didn't know.

"In der clock," she said.

"Why don't you look there again," I said. "Maybe it got pushed into a corner and you didn't see it the first time. Look again."

"No, it iss gone," says Matilda but all the same, when I kept at her, she opened the door of the clock, and, say! I wish you could have seen her face when she pulled out her roll of bills! For

there they were. I had stuck 'em back there myself, of course.

I don't know who looked the queerest, Hans or Matilda, but I guess he did. For Matilda thought she had just missed the bills at first but Hans knew he had taken them and somebody else had taken them at the mill and he didn't see how they got back in the clock.

"Oh, mine moneys iss here! It is safe!" all excited like cries Matilda, and before I could stop her she put her arms around me and kissed me and nearly squeezed me to death at the same time. I don't know which was worse.

"Und der burglars didn't get it!" laughed Matilda. "Here iss all my money und now, Hans, you keep it 'cause I know you vill not buy oil stock now."

"You can bet your shoe laces dot I don't!" says Hans. He took the bills and then he looked at me and I winked at him and I guess he understood. Later on I told him what had happened and he admitted he took the money, as I had guessed, to invest in oil stock. But he didn't.

"Lanky," he says, "you iss der bestest friendt vot effer I hat! I loaf you! You und I iss friendts for life!"

"All right," I said. "And you needn't ever worry that I'll squeal on you. Only don't ever trust a man like Hooker."

"I vont," he says. "Py golly! He vent away und he owes me fifty cents for dot sewing up of rips you dit on his boots."

"I guess he owes more than that," I said. "But let it go."

Then I told Hans about the feeling against me in town and how I thought I'd better move on. He and Matilda tried to get me not to, but I know when I'm welcome in a place and when I'm not. And Beanville sure had no more use for me—at least the people that thought I should have kept quiet another day or so about the fake didn't.

"Thank you, Hans and Matilda," I said, for I'd got to calling them by their first names. "But Sport and I are going to travel on."

Which we did a few days later. And what happened next to me I will tell you about in another book I'm going to write soon which will be called "Lanky Lawson with the One-Ring Circus." A lot of funny things happened to me and you'll find them in that book.

But a day before I packed up to leave Matilda says:

"Lanky I want you should bring Hoptoad over and I will give you a big meal to celebrate der sorrowfulness of your going avay."

"All right," I made answer. So I told Hoptoad. He came over.

And, oh, boy! What a meal that was! Sport got his share and seemed to swell up like a balloon. In some ways I hated to pull my freight out of the Knouse yard, for Matilda was such a crackerjack of a cook. But I felt I had to leave.

So I did.

"I don't know what's going to happen to us,

Sport," I said to my dog. And by the way he looked at me, one ear up and the other ear down, I could see he didn't know, either.

But you'll find out if you read my next book.

THE END

An up-to-date Huckleberry Finn

One of the humorous illustrations in Lanky Lawson the Boy from Nowhere

LAUGH *with* LANKY

in the

Brand New Lanky Lawson Series

by Harry Mason Roe

In this series of books Lanky Lawson tells his own story and does it in his own way. Of unknown parentage, he is keen, quick and full of dry humor—and honest to the core. He is always willing to aid a friend and equally willing to give an enemy what he deserves, but often in a laughable way. He is knocked around from pillar to post, trying all sorts of jobs and making all sorts of odd acquaintances. He helps to bring a swindler to justice, falls in with an aviator who takes him skyward and he becomes an attache of a small circus that is on the verge of going to pieces.

Every boy who reads about Lanky Lawson and his doings will take Lanky right to his heart—"And that's O. K. with me," as Lanky would say.

1. LANKY LAWSON, THE BOY FROM NOWHERE.
2. LANKY LAWSON with THE ONE-RING CIRCUS.
3. LANKY LAWSON AND HIS TRAINED ZEBRA.

Buy the Lanky Books where you bought this one.

Publishers

BARSE & CO.

NEW YORK, N. Y. NEWARK, N. J.

Flag and Country Series

By

PAUL G. TOMLINSON

Cloth **12 mo.** **Illustrated**

DURING the World War the German Secret Service was notorious for its ruthlessness and for its expanse into the remotest corners of our country. Bob Cook and his friend, too young to enlist, do "their bit" in thwarting the efforts of these plotters. His experience with the German Spy and the German Air Fleet are most realistic and thrilling. These are *real* boys' books for *real* boys.

1. BOB COOK AND THE GERMAN SPY.
2. BOB COOK AND THE GERMAN AIR FLEET.
3. BOB COOK'S BROTHER IN THE TRENCHES.

Publishers

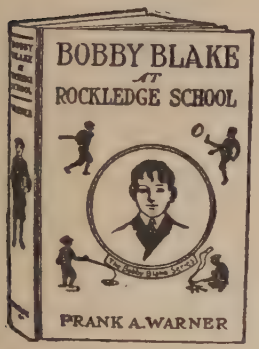
BARSE & CO.

New York, N. Y. **Newark, N. J.**

THE BOBBY BLAKE SERIES

BY FRANK A. WARNER

BOOKS FOR BOYS FROM EIGHT TO TWELVE YEARS OLD



True stories of life at a modern American boarding school. Bobby attends this institution of learning with his particular chum and the boys have no end of good times. The tales of outdoor life, especially the exciting times they have when engaged in sports against rival schools, are written in a manner so true, so realistic, that the reader, too, is bound to share with these boys their thrills and pleasures.

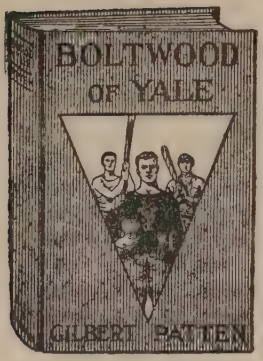
1 BOBBY BLAKE AT ROCKLEDGE SCHOOL.
2 BOBBY BLAKE AT BASS COVE.
3 BOBBY BLAKE ON A CRUISE.
4 BOBBY BLAKE AND HIS SCHOOL CHUMS.
5 BOBBY BLAKE AT SNOWTOP CAMP.
6 BOBBY BLAKE ON THE SCHOOL NINE.
7 BOBBY BLAKE ON A RANCH.
8 BOBBY BLAKE ON AN AUTO TOUR.
9 BOBBY BLAKE ON THE SCHOOL ELEVEN.
10 BOBBY BLAKE ON A PLANTATION.
11 BOBBY BLAKE IN THE FROZEN NORTH.
12 BOBBY BLAKE ON MYSTERY MOUNTAIN.

PUBLISHERS
BARSE & CO.
NEW YORK, N. Y. NEWARK, N. J.

THE COLLEGE LIFE SERIES

By Gilbert Patten

Cloth, large 12 mo. Illustrated



Mr. Patten's intimate knowledge of college life and college athletics, is indicated clearly in these volumes. They will interest alike the young collegian and the old graduate, for here they find stories of unusual interest dealing with phases of life of which they are familiar.

1 BOLTWOOD OF YALE.

2 THE COLLEGE REBEL.

3 ON COLLEGE BATTLEFIELDS.

4 THE CALL OF THE VARSITY.

5 SONS OF OLD ELI.

6 BEN OAKMAN, STROKE.

PUBLISHERS
BARSE & CO.
NEW YORK, N. Y. NEWARK, N. J.

154